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THE ESSENCE AND REALITY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

by

C. BOUGLÉ

Editorial Note: We give here a translation of the Introduction of an old but valuable, and much neglected study of caste,[1] which is further discussed on p. 31 sq. Although we were bound to render the text as accurately as possible, we do not comment upon each point of detail or every minor inaccuracy. The reader is invited to turn his attention rather to our author's approach. It is this which prompted us to give here an English version of the following text.

Is the caste system a universal phenomenon common to all civilizations or is it a unique phenomenon peculiar to India? What relation does this system have to analogous social forms such as guild, clan and class? In order to define the field of our research these questions must be answered at the outset.

I. DEFINITION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

In his valuable observations upon *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*[2] the Abbé Dubois attempts to establish that a division into castes was common to the greater part of the ancient civilizations. In the same way Max Müller in his article on caste[3] tries to show the universality of ethnic differences, political oppositions and professional specializations upon which, according to him, the whole system rests.

The antipathy between Saxon and Celt, the distinction between nobility and gentry, the distance between the man who deals in gold and silver and the man who deals in boots and shoes, are still maintained, and would seem almost indispensable to the healthy growth of every society.

[1] C. Bouglé, *Essais sur le régime des castes* (Paris, 1908; 2d éd. 1927), viii + 280 p. (Travaux de l'Année Sociologique). The Introduction entitled: "Essence et réalité du régime des castes", and the first part of the book (which is summed up here on p. 31 sq.) were first published as an article: "Remarques sur le régime des castes" [Notes on the Caste System] in the *Année Sociologique*, t. IV (Paris, 1900), p. 1–64.

Bibliographical references are printed together at the end of the text. Editor's notes are distinguished by brackets: [... (Ed.)].

[2] English translation by H. K. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1906), pp. 23–27.

[3] *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. II (London, 1867), p. 322.

Analogous implications are not lacking in more recent works. "Another and even graver misconception", says W. Crooke, "is to suppose that caste is peculiar to Hinduism and connected in some peculiarly intimate way with the Hindu faith."[4] It is quite usual for travellers when describing Hindu customs to compare them with their European equivalents; they recall that there is no difference in nature between the repugnance which the Brahman shows for the Paria and the equal repugnance of a lord for a road-sweeper.[5]

Contrary to such opinions, Senart[6] whose views more than those of any other contributed to a reassessment of the question, insists that caste is essentially a Hindu phenomenon; this idea is the pivot upon which his argument rests. In presenting the results of his research on the ethnography of Bengal, Risley offers further evidence for the originality of the sub-divisions in Hindu society.[7]

How can we decide between these contrary views? The choice naturally depends upon the way in which we define the system in question. Was the French Revolution a socialist one? Are primitive societies egalitarian? The reply depends upon our ideas of "revolution" and "egalitarianism". Without an agreed definition discussion can go on for ever. We are bound therefore to begin by constructing some idea of the caste system.

If we consider the current usage of the word, caste seems first of all to arouse the idea of hereditary specialisation. The son of a blacksmith will be a blacksmith just as the son of a warrior will be a warrior. In the assigning of tasks no account is taken of expressed desires nor of manifest aptitudes but only of filiation. Race and occupation are bound together. No other than the son can continue the work of the father and the son cannot choose any other occupation than that of his father. Professions become the obligatory monopolies of families, to perform them is not merely a right but a duty imposed by birth upon the children. Such a spirit must reign in a society before we can say that that society is subject to the rule of caste.

But is this sufficient? It seems to us that in addition we must be able to recognize the existence of different levels in that society, the existence, in other words, of a hierarchy. The word caste makes us think not only of hereditarily appointed work but also of unequally divided rights. To say

[4] *The Tribes and Castes of the N.W. Provinces and Oudh*, I (Calcutta, 1896), p. xvi.
[5] Wilkins, *Modern Hinduism, Religion and Life of Hindus in North India* (London, 1887), p. 163–4. De Lanoye, *L'Inde contemporaine* (Paris, 1855), p. 32.
[6] *Les Castes dans l'Inde. Les faits et le système* (Paris, 1896), p. 257.
[7] *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1896), p. xxi sqq.

caste is not to say monopoly only but also privilege. By the fact of his birth one individual is bound to pay heavy taxes while another escapes them. In the eyes of justice this man is "worth" a hundred pieces of gold and that one only fifty. The golden ring, the red robe and yellow girdle which are the dress of one are strictly forbidden to another. Personal "status" for life is determined by the rank of the group to which one belongs. We are bound to say then that inequality is also the product of the caste system.

But another element also appears to us to call for definition. When we say that the spirit of caste reigns in a society, we mean that the different groups of which that society is composed, repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself, isolates itself, makes every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups. A man refuses to seek a wife outside his traditional circle, he will moreover refuse any food not prepared by his fellows and regard the mere contact of "strangers" as impure and degrading. Such is the man who obeys the "spirit of caste". Horror of misalliance, fear of impure contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated, such are the characteristic signs of this spirit. It seems to us that it is, as it were, designed to atomize the societies into which it penetrates; it divides them not merely into superimposed levels but into a multitude of opposed fragments; it brings each of their elementary groups face to face, separated by a mutual repulsion.

The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies, repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization, and all three must be borne in mind if one wishes to give a complete definition of the caste system. We shall say that a society is subject to this system if it is divided into a large number of mutually opposed groups which are hereditarily specialized and hierarchically arranged – if, on principle, it tolerates neither the *parvenu*, nor miscegenation, nor a change of profession.

That this definition does no violence to the current use of the word may be seen from an examination of some other accepted definitions. For the most part they emphasize the relation between caste ideas and the idea of hereditary specialization. "Caste", says Guizot,[8] "is essentially hereditary; it is the transmission of the same situation and potentialities from father to son. Where there is no heredity, there is no caste." According to Ampère[9] three conditions are essential to the existence of a caste:

[8] *La Civilisation en Europe* (Paris, 1882), p. 138

[9] *Compes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscrip.* (Paris, 1848). Quoted by Revillout, *Droit Egyptien* (Paris, 1884), p. 132 sqq.

"to hold back from certain alien occupations, to prevent any alliance with outsiders, to continue in the profession received from the ancestors".

In order to define the caste system the inequality of rights is frequently added to the discussion of hereditary occupation. According to James Mill:[10]

> The classification and distribution of the members of a community into certain classes or orders, for the performance of certain functions, with the enjoyment of certain privileges, or the endurance of certain burdens, and the establishment of hereditary permanence in these orders, the son being ordained to perform the functions, to enjoy the privileges, or sustain the burdens of the father, and to marry only in his own tribe, without mixture of the classes, in regular succession, through all ages.

According to Burnouf[11] "three elements constitute caste: the division of functions, the hereditary transmission of these functions and hierarchy".

Others have proposed as essential to the system that spirit of division which we have noted as the third characteristic. "Caste", according to Senart,[12] "is a circumscribed and separatist organism by nature. Caste and class do not correspond to each other either in their extent, their characteristics or in their inherent tendencies. Each of the castes which may belong to one class is clearly distinguished from its fellows; it isolates itself with a severity which is not impaired by any superior unity. Class serves political ambitions; caste obeys its narrow scruples, traditional custom and above all certain local influences, all of which ordinarily have no relation with class interests. Most important of all, caste is concerned to preserve its own integrity with a pre-occupation that effects even the most humble of its members." "From the social and political point of view", we read in an English report,[13] "caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbours."

The majority of these definitions have only one fault which is their narrowness. They bring to the fore this or that aspect of the system to be defined whereas we must not lose sight of a single one. Only by keeping these three constituent elements of caste before our eyes can we see in which civilizations it has flourished and with what social forms it is associated.

[10] See article on Caste in Vol. II of *Supplement to the 4th, 5th & 6th editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.*

[11] *Essai sur le Veda, ou Etude sur les religions, la littérature et la constitution sociale de l'Inde* (Paris, 1863), p. 218.

[12] *Op. cit.*, p. 158, 180.

[13] Quoted by Schlagintweit, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Bd. XXXIII, p. 587. Sherring insists on the same point in *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, III (Calcutta, 1879), p. 218, 235.

II. THE REALITY OF THE SYSTEM

If in our search for a caste system in historical reality we are guided by this integral definition we can see at a glance that easy as it is to perceive the scattered elements of the system it is less easy to find it complete and perfect in its entirety. If there are few civilizations into which one or other of its characteristic tendencies has not penetrated, there are also few in which all three united are to be seen flourishing freely.

It is for example clear that even in our contemporary western civilization, we can easily find certain traces of the caste spirit. Here also we may find the horror of misalliance and the fear of polluting contacts. Marriage statistics show that there are certain professions which intermarry freely while there are many others which do so very rarely.[14] A number of customs show that the different "worlds"[15] do not like to mix and thus certain quarters of the city, certain cafés and certain schools are frequented exclusively by certain categories of the population.[16] It is difficult to contest that such distinctions correspond by and large to the degrees of a hierarchy. If the law does not admit the existence of class, the mores demonstrate it clearly: they are far from attributing the same coefficient of "consideration" to the different categories of people and this consideration is translated, if not in declared privilege, in undeniable advantages.[17] Even hereditary specialization is far from having completely disappeared. One can always find villages in which the same industry has

[14] Karl Bücher, *Die Entstehung der Volkswirthschaft* (Tübingen, 2nd edition, 1898), p. 338 sqq.

[15] ["Mondes" in the French, here literally translated. What is meant is "social set" in the popular sense of the phrase (Ed.).]

[16] Several observers have offered evidence to show that these questions of class are not irrelevant to the "crisis of secondary education". See for example Langlois, "La Question de l'Enseignement secondaire", *Revue de Paris*, January 1 and 15th, 1900.

[17] See Goblot, *Revue d'économie politique*, January, 1899. A good definition of class is still, however, difficult to find. When the social hierarchy is no longer blessed by the juridical system the difficulty is that of finding the distinctive signs by which classes are recognised. Some attempts have been made to find the centres of class in the various professions. But if such a definition applies, at least in part, to castes it is decidedly too narrow for classes (see *L'Année Sociologique*, Vol. VI, pp. 125–9 the criticism of A. Bauer's book *Classes Sociales*, Paris, 1902). To understand the differentiation of classes it is obviously necessary to take into account as well as the professional specializations, the differences of economic levels. But these differences in turn need to be evaluated in different manners according to the case. If in the leisure classes more or less ostentatious expenditure is the mark of rank, at other levels it would appear that differences in salary are sufficient to classify people. (See in this connection *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale*, 1905, pp. 890–905 the stimulating remarks of Halbwachs on *La Position du problème sociologique des classes*. There the author summarizes and criticises the theories of Schmeller, Sombart and Bücher.)

been practised for centuries;[18] the number of occupations monopolized by particular ethnic sections is still considerable;[19] finally the instances in which fathers transmit not only their fortunes to their sons but also their professions seem to be becoming more frequent.[20]

However numerous may be such indications no one would in fact maintain that a caste system dominates our civilization which in fact withdraws further from such a system at every step. If we analyse the judicial, political and economic reforms which have taken place in modern times we cannot fail to see that our society is obeying, more or less, slowly but surely, the exigence of egalitarian ideas.[21] Habits which recall the caste system, even though they continue to exist in fact, are no longer consecrated by law. More and more are they being considered as survivals.

Does it then follow that we have only to return to our own middle-ages to find the caste system? Certainly the further back in time we go the more clear cut do social divisions appear. Between the superimposed levels of the past the differences are marked not only by custom but also by law; occupations are frequently monopolized by families. But we have only to remind ourselves of the sociological characteristics of the two powers which dominated the middle-ages – the church and the feudal nobility – in order to see that that condition of society is far from corresponding exactly to the system which we have defined.

It has frequently been said of the clergy that it constituted a caste. But as Guizot[22] has correctly observed the expression is essentially wrong. If the idea of heredity is inherent in the idea of caste, the word caste cannot be applied to the Christian Church since only celibates can be its functionaries. Where functions so far from being reserved by fathers for their sons are distributed among men who cannot be descended from their predecessors, and where co-optation replaces heredity, there may very well be a spirit of unity but that spirit is not the spirit of caste. In fact, by its methods of recruitment the clergy indirectly served ideas contrary to those upon which the caste system rests; a Church which can make a pontiff of a slave and elevate the son of a shepherd above kings,

[18] In France for example the villages of Monistrol and Villedieu-les-Poêles.

[19] Numerous examples are to be found in Auerbach, *Les Races et les Nationalités en Autriche-Hongrie* (Paris, 1898), pp. 75, 119, 125, 209, 266.

[20] There is an informative discussion of this subject in the *Revue de Sociologie* for the year 1900. It shows that the cases in which the father passes on his trade to the son are not rare but that they are difficult to classify and to enumerate.

[21] We have tried to show this in the first part of our *Idées Egalitaires*.

[22] *Civilisation en Europe*, p. 138.

brought about that kind of social redemption which perhaps more than its dogmas, were lessons in equality.[23]

Similarly a great distance separates the feudal system from the caste system proper. First of all to the extent that the former followed the principle that "the status of the land determines that of the land-holder", it contradicts a principle of the caste system. By not determining the station of men by their birth it introduces upheavals in the hereditary hierarchy. In the course of twenty-four hours, simply because a battle or a contract has made him master of a town, a man may find that his position in the social scale has been raised. Let us add that when such a man is the holder of several fiefs his position becomes ambiguous; vassal to some, suzerain to others, his social rank is no longer clearly defined. Such a system does not approach a strict hierarchy.[24]

From another point of view the divisive quality of feudalism prevented individuals from forming castes. Each lord lived on his own lands and governed on his own account a certain number of men who were solely dependent upon him; feudality was not built up of superimposed collectivities but rather by a "collection of individual despotisms".[25] In this way we may maintain without paradox that, just as the Church was, in certain ways, a school for equality, the feudal system was a school for independence. Its organization lent itself to individualism. It did not cut up society into mutually repelling compact bodies, it did not fragmentize it into castes.

Classical antiquity, no more than our own middle-ages, gives us a precise picture of the system that we seek. In the "city" certainly a strict hierarchy for long marked the different ranks. Without taking the slaves into account we know how many religious, judicial and political inequalities separated the plebian from the patrician. Hereditary specialization was not unknown; in Greek history we frequently hear of families of doctors or families of priests;[26] in Athens the names of four Ionian tribes were the names of professions.[27] Finally there is no doubt that the elementary groups which appear to have formed the city endeavoured not to become mixed; as long as possible the *genos*, faithful to the ancestor cult, isolated and retracted itself.

[23] Cf. Fustel de Coulanges, *L'Alleu et le Domaine rural*, p. 299.

[24] [To anticipate an objection here we would point out that Bouglé means several fiefs of very different status so that technically one man may be the inferior of another to whom, by virtue of other holdings, he is the superior (Ed.).]

[25] This expression is taken from Guizot's *Regime féodal*.

[26] Thus the Eleusinian Eumolpides.

[27] Schömann, *Griechische Altertümer*, I (Berlin, 1897), p. 327 sqq.

But it was precisely the destiny and, as it were, the mission of the ancient city to transcend all these tendencies. Hereditary specialization, in so far as it was ever the rule[28] became the exception there very swiftly. Hierarchical organization never amounted to the superimposition of opposed groups. In fact to the extent that the city remained a collection of *genē*, the inferiors did not form separate groups: slaves or clients, they belonged to one family: they were of the same body as the Eupatrid.[29] Later when an independent *plebe* came into being it was not long content to be regarded as an inferior society. It imposed new divisions upon the city which, cutting across the old divisions, forced the citizens to mix. Agglomerated here by demes and there according to their fortune or their arms, they could no longer remain grouped by clan. Progressively and as it were methodically isonomy, isegory and isotomy were achieved.[30] Reformers moved constantly to obliterate the traces left by the ancient divisions.

Thus since antiquity western civilization has rejected the system which we have defined.

We can best prove how difficult it is to discover this system in its pure condition, not by a general review of civilizations but by the examination of a distinctive case. The example of ancient Egypt is frequently offered as that of a society subject to the caste system: let us therefore try to find there hereditary specialization, strict hierarchy, and a clear cut opposition of groups.

If we rely upon the evidence of antiquity there seems to be no doubt in the matter. The Egyptians, Herodotus tells us, were divided into seven *genē*: priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, merchants, interpreters and pilots. Only the priests and the warriors enjoyed marks of distinction; special lands were reserved for them; they were exempt from all taxes. But like the rest of the population they were tied to the occupations of their ancestors. If one of the priests died he was replaced by his son. The

[28] Cf. von Müller, *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Nordlingen, 1886), IV, I.

[29] No doubt one may find in Rome the *gentes minores* and the *genē* analogous to those of the labourers and artisans in Athens (cf. Wilbrandt, *Die politische und sociale Bedeutung der attischen Geschlechter vor Solon*). The *genos* was so essential to city law that the plebe, in order to enter the city, had to organize itself into *genē*. But at this time the collective inferiority of the *plebe* was not yet absolute and the plebians were beginning their campaign for the equality of rights.

[30] [Equality of political rights, equal rights of speech, equal rights of honour and privilege (Ed.).]

warriors had no right to practise any other occupation than that of arms which was passed on from father to son.[31]

Diodorus is no less explicit. He recalls that the land was divided into three parts: that of the priests, that of the kings and that of the soldiers. As for the inferior orders (*syntagmata*), the shepherds, labourers and artisans, they were permitted neither to enter into public affairs nor to practise any occupation other than the traditional one of the family. Nor does Diodorus offer this as a custom merely, for he tells us that it was commanded by the laws.[32]

Modern discoveries tend at first sight to confirm this testimony of the past. The trilingual Rosetta decree tells us of the lands divided, as Herodotus said, into sacred, military and royal lands. Other documents such as the Canopos decree bear witness to the privileges reserved to the sacerdotal and warrior classes.[33] A number of inscriptions also prove that there were veritable dynasties at every level of society. We have the coffins of thirty generations of priests attached to the Theban god Mentu:[34] almost all belonged to two or three families which married amongst themselves or took their wives from the priests of Ammon. One family of architects is known to have served the royal family for several centuries under the various Egyptian dynasties. All the contracts and documents of one family of Theban choachytes[35] from the reign of Tabraka (680 B.C.) up to the Roman occupation are extant in the demotic: like their far off ancestors the descendants were poor craftsmen. Facts of this nature have led Revillout[36] to conclude that the classical view of Egypt was substantially correct and that the caste system prevailed there.

Let us, however, look a little more closely. The division of labour does not appear to have been always and everywhere as clear as has been believed. Sacerdotal and military functions did not exclude each other. There survives the sarcophagus of a priest of the goddess Athor who, at the same time that he was priest, was a commander of infantry.[37] Specialization was not then absolute and the accumulation of professions was not forbidden. What then of the inheritance of professions? In fact

[31] Herodotus, II, 164, 168, 37, 166.
[32] Diodorus, I, 73; I, 74, sections 3, 8.
[33] Cf. Revillout, *Cours de droit égyptien*, I, p. 137, 138.
[34] Cf. Maspero, *Histoire ancienne des Peuples de l'Orient classique*, I (Paris, 1895), p. 305.
[35] [A name given to a certain class of priests who were concerned with the preservation of the mummies (Ed.).]
[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 131, 136, 147.
[37] Cf Ampère, *loc. cit.*

we may say that the son of the high priest had the greatest opportunity of a place in the temple and that the son of the scribe in his turn took up work in the office. But if these facts, however numerous, prove that "nepotism is as old as the pyramids"[38] they do not prove that the transmission of occupation from father to son was legally prescribed.[39]

We have, moreover, proof that a man was not tied to his father's occupation. Not only in the demotic period do we see the emergence of a sort of bourgeois class whose members do not seem to have any particular occupational affiliation, but also in the hieratic period the number of *parvenus* was considerable.[40] The famous Amten was the son of a poor scribe. Placed originally in an office of supplies he later became a crier and taxer of the colonists, then chief of the ushers and supervisor of all the king's flax; soon he is the head of a village, of a town, of a nome and finally is made Primate of the Western Gate. He died covered with honour, the possessor of many fiefs, having married his daughters well and placed his sons advantageously.[41] This example shows that the hierarchy was far from being petrified. The power of the king could overthrow the traditional order of things. We should further note that while it was the rule in the Egyptian feudal system for lands to be inherited, heredity was not enough for a noble to be recognized as such and a formal investiture by the Pharao was needed. By giving lands or charges the king could also create nobles.[42] Here we have facts indicating a social mobility incompatible with the rigidity of the caste system.

Let us add finally that the spirit of division and mutual opposition, which seems to us to be one of the constituent elements of the caste system, never appears to have dominated Egyptian society. We have no positive proof that systematic prohibitions for long isolated its elementary groups. On the contrary it has been rightly observed that in Egypt the administrative system very quickly effaced the spontaneous divisions of society. The exigencies of a common culture overcame there the hostilities of clans: the Nile, it has been said, demanded unity.[43] Whatever may the reason it is certain that Egyptian civilization does not show us that invincible resistance to unification which characterizes the caste system. In our

[38] The expression used by Ampère.

[39] We should be on our guard against confusing the actual facts with the law. Thus in many societies where polygamy is legally admitted a large number of men remain monogamous – either due to their poverty or to the scarcity of women.

[40] This information comes from Revillout himself, *op. cit.*, I, p. 165.

[41] See Maspero, *op. cit.*, I, p. 290.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 300 sq. Cf. Revillout, *loc. cit.*, p. 145.

[43] Leist, *Græco-italische Rechtsgeschichte* (Iena, 1884), p. 106.

own western civilization such a system was prevented by the power of democracy; in Egyptian civilization a strong monarchy impeded its development.

III. THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Does this system encounter analogous obstacles in India? Or on the contrary can we see the three essential tendencies freely at play there?

First of all we can nowhere find specialization pushed to such a degree as in India. Certainly the number of differentiated occupations is less than in our own contemporary society; but in order for a society to have ten thousand professions and to have seen them increase by more than four thousand in thirteen years[44] that society must have a "scientific" industry which alone is capable of multiplying and varying both the means and the needs of production. So far as India was left to itself it did not see such progress.

But while her methods of production remained relatively simple she still divided the various tasks as far as was possible among different groups. We have only to think of the number of sub-groups of which each major occupational group is composed in order to appreciate this. Thus we may distinguish six merchant castes, three of scribes, forty of peasants, twenty-four of journeymen, nine of shepherds and hunters, fourteen of fishermen and sailors, twelve of various kinds of artisans, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths and potters, thirteen of weavers, thirteen of distillers, eleven of house servants.[45] No doubt these internal subdivisions do not all correspond to professional distinctions. But in many cases what distinguishes a caste from its fellows is that it abstains from certain procedures, does not use the same materials, does not manufacture the same products.

In Buddhist legends different castes are distinguished according to the instruments that they use or according to the fish that they catch.[46] In the matter of clothing those who make turbans will have nothing to do with those who make sashes. Amongst leather workers one caste makes shoes, another repairs them and yet another fashions leather flasks.[47] One may

[44] As has happened in Germany. Cf. Bücher, *Die Entstehung der Volkswirthschaft* p. 319.

[45] Schlagintweit, *art. cit.*, p. 578.

[46] R. Fick, *Die Sociale Gliederung im Nordöstlichen Indien zu Budda's Zeit mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kastenfrage* (Kiel, 1897), p. 194. Cf. English translation by S. Mitra (Calcutta. 1920), p. 302. [What our author writes is more literally true of the hunters, *ibid.* (Ed.).]

[47] Sylvain Lévi, article "Inde" in the *Grande Encyclopédie.*

not see, we are told, the same man driving the plough as tends the beast. Among the Ghosi clans one looks after the cows and only sells milk; others buy milk and sell butter.[48] The Kumhars of Orissa are divided into Uria Kumhars who work standing at large urns and Kattya Kumhars who sit down at a wheel to make little pots. The coolie who carries a load on his head will refuse to carry it on his shoulders; he who uses a pole will not use a knapsack. Each of the house-servant castes has its own work and each energetically refuses to do the work of others.[49] From the top to the bottom of Hindu society the accumulation of function is forbidden in principle.

A change of function is no less forbidden. Work is divided once for all and each has his allotted task from his childhood. Heredity of occupation is the rule and has been since antiquity. It was this trait that struck the Muslim traveller who visited India in the 9th century.[50] "In all these kingdoms... there are families of men of letters, of doctors, of craftsmen working on house-building and one never finds anyone in other families professing the same occupation." In the Jatakas which give us a glimpse of Hindu society in the 6th century the expression "son of a caravan leader" signifies caravan leader; "son of a blacksmith" signifies blacksmith, the families of potters and stone-masons are designated there, allusion is made to the streets and villages where certain hereditary specializations are localized.[51]

Strabo had already observed that each class in India has its particular occupation.[52] Even the names of castes, of which the greater part are the names of professions also, sufficiently prove the antiquity of specialization in Hindu society.[53]

No doubt there are many exceptions to the rule. It is not a question

[48] Nesfield, *Brief View of the Caste System of the N.W. Provinces and Oud* (Allahabad, 1885), p. 19.

[49] Numerous facts of this nature are to be found in V. Jacquemont's Voyages (*Voyage dans l'Inde, pendant les années 1828 à 1832*, Paris, 1835–44).

[50] *Ancienne Relation des Indes et de la Chine*, 1728 edition, p. 40.

[51] Fick, *op. cit.*, p. 178, 180, 181. [Eng. trans., p. 276–281 (Ed.).]

[52] Strabo, XV, I, 49.

[53] Thus the word Mayara, which designates "pastry-cook" is an altered form of the Sanskrit Modakakara (pastry-cook); Tatwa and Tanti, which designate weavers, derive from Tantuvāya (weaver); the name of the Kandus (grain-parchers) is said to come from the Sanskrit Kandu (oven), etc. Nesfield (*op. cit.*, p. 84) says that 77% of the names of castes are the ancient names of occupations. It is true that a certain number of the etymologies given by Nesfield have been contested, but a sufficient number remain uncontested to sustain his argument (see for example Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, I, pp. 795, 820, or the more recent work of Jogendranath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, Calcutta 1896, pp. 236, 238, 252).

here of recent changes of profession which have inclined many of all castes to agriculture or to the administrative service:[54] these result from the disturbance of Hindu tradition by the English invasion. But at all times the Brahmans have kept all kinds of occupation open for themselves. So far from being confined to the study of sacred texts, we find some who are ploughmen, soldiers, tradesmen and cooks.[55] "To fill one's belly one must play many parts", said one of them to the Abbé Dubois.[56]

Their superiority opens greater possibilities to them than the common run of mortality enjoy. This superiority implies purity and it is true that the concern to preserve purity excludes many kinds of activity. Does not the doctrine of *ahimsa*, which forbids the wounding of even the smallest living creature, forbid the priest to cut open the soil with a plough blade?[57] But faced with material necessities such prohibitions must be softened. Indeed the theory itself plays a part in this: the Brahmanic codes recognized the right of the Brahman to practise different occupations in times of distress. If Manu formally forbids him to traffic in liquor, perfumes, meat and wool, he permits him to engage in military service, agriculture, the care of herds, and a certain number of commercial enterprises.

In their turn the members of the other castes, which these same codes claim to tie to their traditional occupation, in fact and following the Brahman's example, take certain liberties with the rule. We have just observed that the names of castes are commonly those of ancient occupations. But let us also add that it is relatively rare today to find a caste practising the occupation which its name designates. The Atishbaz are indeed, as their name indicates, artificers and the N'Albauds farriers. But it is not the case that all the Chamars are tanners today, the Ahir shepherds, the Banjara porters, the Luniya salt-workers. The Baidya, according to their tradition, are a caste of doctors. But hardly a third of them practises medicine: many are teachers in schools, farmers, stewards.[58] Amongst the Sunris, traditionally distillers, one may find in some provinces, carpenters and tilers and elsewhere, grain merchants. If in Assam the Dom are fishermen, they are cultivators in Kashmir and masons in Kumaon.[59] The Kansari and Sankari are employed as

[54] This last fact contradicts the supposed law that there is no return to agriculture once another occupation has been tried. See discussion referred to in *Revue de Sociologie*, 1900.

[55] Senart, *op. cit.*, p. 42 sq. Cf. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 74, 112.

[56] Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 292. [Actually given as a dictum (Ed.).]

[57] Crooke, *op. cit.*, I, p. cxlix.

[58] Risley, *op. cit.*, I. p. 49. *Gait Bengal Report* (*Census of India*, 1901, vi), p. 351.

[59] Risley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 280.

domestic servants although in theory they belong among the commercial castes.[60] Among the Kaibartta of Bengal, while the Mechos have remained fishermen in accordance with their tradition, the Helos have turned to agriculture.[61] Generally today we can count many more cultivators and fewer herdsmen than there ought to be if the sacred divisions were respected.[62] The system of hereditary specialization in India allows them considerably more mobility than one would at first sight expect.[63]

But we should stress that this mobility is collective rather than individual. One will rarely see a young man leave the occupation of his ancestors in order to follow his road alone.[64] It is rather groups that leave the whole in order to take up some new profession; but within the detached group the rule is no less rigorously applied: the son continues to do the work of the father. Let us add that while, as we see, changes of occupation are not in fact rare, such changes remain in the eyes of the law illicit or scandalous. When we considered Egypt we pointed out that the fact does not prove the existence of the law. Although it was the son who most often succeeded to the occupation of the father it does not follow that hereditary specialization was the rule in Egyptian society. Here we

[60] Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

[61] Risley, *ibid.*, I, p. lxxii.

[62] Castes which are said to be agricultural only comprise 6½ million members but 34¾ million agriculturers were actually counted. Inversely 5½ million people belong to pastoral castes but no more than about 337,000 were actually found engaged in pastoral occupations Cf. Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. cxlv.

[63] Enthoven analysing the situation in the Bombay Province (*Census of India*, 1901, ix, p. 209, 220) observes that only 22% of the Brahmans were faithful to their traditional occupation. Despite the classical prohibition one finds that among them 47% were in the administration and agriculture, 5% were engaged in food services of one sort or another.

Among the Vanis, who correspond fairly closely to the traditional Vaishya, 25% were occupied in commerce, 39% in food services, 10% in manufacturing cloth or clothing, 3% in agriculture, 2% in the administration.

Sylvain Lévi (*Le Nepal, étude historique d'un royaume hindou*, Paris, 1905, I, p. 246) points out that in many cases a caste "reserves" an occupation for its members rather than it "imposes" one upon them – above all, let us add, if it occupies a sufficiently high rank in the hierarchy. Thus in Nepal the Buddhist caste, in every respect an imitation of a Hindu caste, has formed around occupation alone. It was created for the exploitation of a sort of legal monopoly accessible only to the descendants of the founders. "The monopoly, it is true, is not always lucrative, as for example the privilege of painting the eyes of the image of Bhairava. The benefices from that are frequently insufficient to provide a livelihood for the growing number of interested parties. Fortunately the list of hereditary professions, long as it is, does not exhaust all the categories of livelihoods." The caste freely allows its members "to escape into the undefined area of occupations which do not belong to anyone".

[64] See however certain examples cited from the Jatakas, by C. Rhys Davids, *Notes on early economic conditions in nothern India*, p. 868.

may follow an analogous and inverse argument. Because the son in India does not invariably follow the occupation of the ancestors it does not follow that hereditary specialization was not the rule in Hindu society. This is a legitimate inference when we have established that a certain sanction was attached to a change of profession and that they did not take place without a certain degradation of social rank.

We may be told that Brahmans although exercising very different professions remain universally respected. But first of all the peculiar position which they enjoy in Hindu society explains how they escape the general sanction: the Brahman is in a sense always above the law. Secondly it is not precisely the case that the Brahman is respected to the same degree in all situations: the respect given to a Pandit is quite different from the respect given to a cook. As for the mass of non-Brahman castes it is generally recognized that an admitted change of occupation, being a derogation of the norms essential to the social organization, carries with it a forfeit of status.[65] When the members of a caste change their profession they either hide the fact or try to justify it by some legend.[66] They feel themselves guilty of a general reproach.

Even when the change is the point of departure for a rise in the economic order the changes themselves are not liked. Some Sunri have risen above their occupation of distilling and have become great merchants. They now call themselves Shaha and deny any connection with those who have held to the traditional occupation of the caste. Nevertheless these *parvenus* continue to be viewed in a dubious light. Conversely those who piously hold to the profession of their fathers, however low, however impure, derive honour from fidelity to tradition. In the Sakuntala the fisherman who is reproached with his cruelty to the fish, replies: "Sir, do not admonish me, for we should never abandon the labour of our ancestors, however lowly it may be." And no doubt it is in obedience to this same sentiment that many castes close their ranks and make desperate efforts before abandoning their traditional occupation under the pressure of want. We are told that 30% of the weavers of West Bengal had to die before the remainder, ruined by English imports, could decide to look elsewhere for their daily bread:[67] to such an extent does adherence to the ancestral occupation impose itself as a duty upon the Hindu conscience.

[65] Steele, *Law and Customs of Hindu Castes* (London, 1868), p. xi. He considers fidelity to the ancestral occupation as one of the criteria of caste dignity.

[66] Or by some fantastic etymology. Thus the Telis of Bengal who have given up oil-pressing for large scale commerce, claim that their name derives from *Tula* (shop scales) and not from *Taila* (oil). Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

[67] Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 228, foot-note.

In estimating the position of hereditary specialization in Hindu society we are bound to remember that this society is hierarchically organized. Nowhere may we observe distinctions more clearly cut, nowhere such extravagance of both respect and disdain.

Travellers have frequently painted the sad picture of Paria life. Thus the Abbé Dubois:

> Hardly anywhere are they allowed to cultivate the soil for their own benefit, but are obliged to hire themselves out to the other castes... Their masters may beat them at pleasure; the poor wretches having no right either to complain or to obtain redress... What chiefly disgusts other natives is the revolting nature of (their) food, they contend for carrion with dogs.

On the Malabar coast they are not even allowed to build huts. If a Nayar meets them he may kill them. On the other hand, see the account of the guru's entry:

> They ride on a richly caparisoned elephant or in a superb palanquin. Many have an escort of cavalry, and are surrounded by guards... Bands of musicians playing all sorts of instruments precede them... along the route incense and other perfumes are burnt... new clothes are perpetually spread for him to pass over; triumphal arches... are erected.

A pinch of the cow-dung ash with which he marks his brow is an inestimable gift; his curse is petrifying, his blessing will save.[68]

Not all Brahmans lead this royal life but the greater part live at the expense of other castes. In principle the Brahman should live upon the alms of others. If you ask him for something he will reply: "Get along with you", for he is made to receive and not to give.[69]

When one passes through a hamlet, says Jacquemont,[70] one might believe that the Brahman caste is the most numerous for they remain indolently at home while others work. Another traveller tells us of the ferryman of Benares who is sufficiently honoured if a Brahman deigns to employ his boat. Another says, speaking of the Brahmans, that they walk with an air of self-satisfaction and conscious superiority which is inimitable. It is not surprising, as the Abbé Dubois tells us, that they are superbly egotistic[71] for are they not brought up to believe that all is owing to them and that they owe nothing? Their absolute superiority is as uncontested as[72] the absolute inferiority of the Parias.

[68] Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 49, 55, 61, 128, 125–6.
[69] Sonnerat, I, p. 98.
[70] See Jacquemont, *Voyage*, I, p. 234.
[71] Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
[72] Again certain exceptions. Cf. Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Max Müller, *op. cit.*, pp. 334–338. But, "apart from the fact that these exceptions are rare, they are generally dased upon some definite motive" (Senart, *op. cit.*, p. 101).

Between these two extremes the great multitude of castes are arranged in their different degrees, each one preoccupied to hold its rank and to preserve its prerogatives from usurpation.[73] In order to gauge rank different considerations enter into account: purity of food, fidelity to the traditional occupation, abstention from forbidden foods.[74] Practically speaking the eminence or baseness of a caste is determined above all by the relations which it has with the Brahman caste. Will the Brahmans accept a gift of any sort whatever from a man of this caste? Will they without hesitation take a cup of water from his hand? Will they make difficulties? Will they refuse with horror?[75] Here is the true criterion of the dignity of a caste: the measure of its relative nobility is the Brahman's esteem.

If we consult the sacred codes we find these broad social divisions expressed with the precision of mathematical relations. We discover that the number of ceremonies practised, the total amount of fines imposed, even the rate of interest paid, varies with the rank of the castes and that in all circumstances the Brahman receives the maximum profit and suffers the minimum loss.[76]

No doubt, as we shall see we cannot trust the codes in matters of detail. The actual distinctions are far from being as strict as the ideal ones. At many points the hierarchy is uncertain.[77] The position of a caste varies in different regions[78] and questions of precedence give rise to frequent

[73] According to Dubois questions of precedence sometimes gave rise to bloody battles (*op. cit.*, p. 26). Since the recent census attention has been drawn to the emotion displayed by some castes in their fear that they were not classed according to their rank. The khattris convened a meeting of protest at Bareilly and sent a memorandum to the census authorities, in order to insist upon their right to be classed as Kshatriyas. (*Census of India*, 1901. General Report by Risley and Gait, I, p. 539.)

[74] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. x.

[75] In his enumeration of castes, Bhattacharya always begins by asking these questions (*op. cit.*, first part). The English investigators for the most part come to the same criteria (*Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VI, p. 137, Vol. XVIII, p. 487, Vol. XXV, p. 133).

[76] Weber, *Indische Studien*, X, p. 20–4; Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 23, 28; Jolly, "Recht und Sitte", in the *Grundriss der indo-arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde* of Bühler (Strasbourg, 1896), p. 127.

[77] Jacquemont (*Voyage*, I, p. 281–2) points out how difficult it is to make a sure classification of castes. Not only are the same names found in different provinces, but also in each province there is no universally recognised order of precedence. "A man of very low caste will never put his caste in the very first rank but he will put it several ranks above that to which the other castes have agreed to assign it."

[78] When low castes improve their position they look for a genealogy which will exalt them; for their old name they invent a new etymology, or even try to change their name. But their rivals tolerate this rise with difficulty, whence the interminable disputes. Many examples could be given: the Kshettris claim to be Kshatriyas and observe the rites laid down for military castes, but others class them as Banias. The enriched Sunris

disputes. But these uncertainties leave the principle unquestioned; the very disputes and the fights to which they lead, prove to what a point the members of Hindu society are imbued with the idea that they ought to be hierarchically organized.

All observers have been struck by the fact that these specialized elements of Hindu society are not only superimposed but also mutually opposed and that the force which animates the whole system of the Hindu world is a force of repulsion which keeps the various bodies separate and drives each one to retire within itself.

The disgust which Europeans inspire in Hindus has frequently been noted. A traveller recounts that a Brahman with whom he was acquainted used to visit him very early in the morning: the Brahman preferred to see him before taking his bath so that he might then cleanse himself of the impurities which he had incurred. A Hindu with self-respect would die of thirst rather than drink from the cup which had been used by a "Mleccha".[79] But what is noteworthy is that the Hindus appear to feel something of the same repugnance in regard to each other; a proof that they are to a certain extent foreigners to each other. In Calcutta great difficulty was experienced over the establishment of a water system: how could people of different castes use the same tap? The contact of the Paria inspires such horror that they are obliged, as their name implies, to carry warning bells which announce their presence.[80] On the Malabar coast there are people who are forced to go almost naked for fear that others may be touched by the billowing of their clothes.[81] The fear of an impure atmosphere is from all time, one of the dominating traits of the

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have for long striven to be recognized as a pure caste. But only the degraded prophets of Hinduism flatter their ambition. Risley tells us that even those who work for the Sunris do not like to touch their food. A Chandala would lose caste if he touched the seat upon which a Sunri was seated. See Risley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 279. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 79, 190, 124, 138, 255, and Schlagintweit's article already cited, p. 557, 566, 574.

[79] Cf. Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, I, p. 157; Sonnerat, *op. cit.*, I, p. 110; De Lanoye, *L'Inde Contemporaine*, 1885, p. 128.

[80] Christian missionaries despite the doctrines which they try to spread are obliged to take these repugnances into account. Fr. Suau (*L'Inde Tamoule*, Paris, 1901) says that in many places the right hand side of the nave in the church is reserved for the Parias: they communicate only after the others. In Vadakenkoulam, a village composed of Sanars and Moudeliars, mutual hostility is so lively that it had to build for the christian neophytes a church with two naves radiating from the common choir.

[81] Schlagintweit, *art. cit.*, p. 581. Reports from Cochin State classify the impure castes according to the distance at which they pollute: some at 24 paces, some at 36, others at 48 and at 64. (Quoted by Vidal de la Blache, *Annales de Géographie*, juillet, 1906, p. 440).

Hindu soul.[82] The Jatakas are full of stories which bear witness to the disgust which has, in all ages, been inspired by contact with, or even sight of, the impure races. A Brahman discovers that he has been travelling with a Chandala: "Damn you, candāla, raven of ill-omen; move out of the wind." Two friends, the daughters of a Gahapati and a Purohit, are playing by the city gate. Two Chandala brothers come on the scene and the girls flee to wash their eyes.[83]

Undoubtedly not all races provoke an equal disgust. Nevertheless in the eyes of an orthodox Hindu any caste, other than his own, is in a sense impure. This sentiment of latent repulsion manifests itself clearly in certain circumstances.

For example, someone may not fear the contact of the man of another caste but nevertheless refuses to eat with him. It is above all from food that contamination is feared. It can only be eaten amongst caste-fellows: it should not even be touched by a stranger,[84] whose glance is sometimes sufficient to pollute it. If a Paria so much as looks into a kitchen all the utensils should be broken.[85] Jacquemont recounts that one day at dinner time he almost spoilt his servant's meal. "When the syce saw me coming he cried out in the most pitiable manner, 'Sir, sir – I beg of you. Oh sir, take care. I am a Hindu, sir, a Hindu'." He goes on to say that in his escort of sepoys there were as many stoves, pots and fires as there were men. "I don't know whether they are all of different castes, but there are not two who will eat together."[86] In fact the Hindu isolates himself while eating in order to be sure of not contracting impurity. Among the Rajputs different families, even though they belong to the same caste, eat together only with difficulty.[87] Whence the saying "For twelve Rajputs – thirteen cooks." "For three Kanauja Brahmans", another saying runs, "you need thirty hearths."[88] Scruples of this kind are naturally more lively in the high castes. But from the top to the bottom of the social scale, one encounters the same concern. In time of famine the Santal allowed them-

[82] R. Fick, *op. cit.*; Engl. Transl. p. 40.
[83] *Ibid.*, 26, 28; Engl. Transl., p. 40, 43–44.
[84] We have to distinguish amongst foods. The manner in which they are prepared makes them, if one may say so, more or less "dangerous". Brahmans will take food from certain castes which has been cooked with clarified butter (*pakki*) and not food cooked in other ways (*kachchi*). See Gait, *Bengal Report* (*Census of India*, 1901, VI, p. 367).
[85] Sonnerat, *op. cit.*, I, p. 108.
[86] Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
[87] Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
[88] Risley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 157.

selves to die of hunger rather than touch food prepared by Brahmans.[89] He who eats food forbidden by his caste becomes an "out-cast" an "outlaw". Thus it has been possible to say that caste is primarily a matter of food.[90]

There is however one sphere in which the protectionism of caste raises yet higher barriers: more than a matter of food, caste is a "matter of marriage".[91] Marriage outside the caste is strictly forbidden: the caste is rigorously endogamous. We must add that this endogamy is coupled with an internal exogamy. While there is a wide circle within which a Hindu must find a wife there is a narrow circle within the first in which he may not marry. Many castes, in imitation of the Brahmans, divide themselves into *gotras*, the members of the same *gotra* may not intermarry. Sometimes the prohibition applies to the eponymous group composed of the descendants of the same ancestor, sometimes to a territorial group composed of the inhabitants of the same locality.[92] These rules of exoggamy[93] are complex and vary according to the caste. What we have to bear in mind for the present is the rigour of the general rule which isolates castes and tends to keep them eternally closed to one another.

No doubt there are many exceptions to this rule also. The notions brought into being by the existence of hierarchy sometimes triumph over the feelings of mutual repulsion which otherwise separate castes. Many families seek husbands for their daughters in higher castes; "hypergamy" then overcomes endogamy.[94] Certain Radhya of high rank are so sought after as grooms that they make marriage their profession: they keep registers in which they write the names of the women they have honoured by their union.[95] Even in high castes derogation of the rule of endogamy is not rare. According to Carnegy[96] the Rajputs of Oudh used to take their wives from the aborigines without any degradation of their descendants. In the same way it is habitual, according to Crooke, for Jats to seek

[89] Risley remarks in this connection how important it is when distributing succour in time of famine, to know the hierarchy of the castes and to know from whose hand each may receive food. The Chattar-Kais in Orissa are now among the "lost castes' because they ate in the relief kitchens in 1866 (*Tribes and Castes*, I, p. viii).

[90] Elliot, *Memoirs on the history, folklore and distribution of the races of the N.W. Provinces*, I, Ed. Beames (London, 1869), p. 67, footnote.

[91] Risley, *op. cit.*, I, p. xlii.

[92] Risley, I, p. li sqq.

[93] [The French text reads "endogamiques", an obvious misprint for "exogamiques" (Ed.).]

[94] Hypergamy is the term proposed by Risley for this phenomenon.

[95] Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Risley, *op. cit.*, p. lxxxii.

[96] Cited by Schlagintweit, *art. cit.*, p. 560.

out girls of low caste, pass them off as girls of their own blood, and marry them.

Even lacking such observations the analysis of (physical) anthropology[97] could prove that, despite the most strict prohibitions there have been innumerable mixtures of all kinds.[98] Nevertheless the fact remains that the only "pure marriage is that contracted between people of the same caste, that the public conscience, by the sanctions which it applies, manifests its concern to maintain this ideal and that, even more than a change of occupation, a marriage outside the caste carries with it a degradation of status; to such an extent is this separatist tendency inherent in Hindu society.

We could, moreover, measure the strength of this tendency by its results. The multiplicity of the groups into which Hindu society is divided is the best proof of the existence of a reciprocal repulsion between its elements.

If we were to confine ourselves to her sacred books, India would not appear to be so divided. According to Manu, there are four castes and "there are not five". This tradition has, up to the present day, dominated both historians and travellers. But it is precisely the value of this tradition that the recent work of indologists invites us to suspect. Criticizing the Brahmanic theory of caste, Senart has pointed out its waverings and incertitudes: on more than one point it masks and falsifies the reality more than it records it.[99] In the particular matter of the number of castes, the sacred codes, immediately after having affirmed that there are only four, implicitly recognize a considerable number. The "theory of mixed castes" offers us, in fact, a certain number of degraded castes resulting from illicit unions between pure castes. But the theory is transparently a theory constructed after the event, to explain what could not be denied. It is an avowal of the multiplicity of castes whose names, professional or geographical, betray for the most part a very ancient origin.[100] Furthermore if, to test the veracity of the Brahmanic codes we consult the Buddhist literature, we certainly find the theory of four castes mentioned, but rather as a system for discussion than as a picture of the facts. Throughout the legends of the 6th century Hindu society appears already

[97] [Bouglé writes "l'analyse anthropologique" here, but it is clear that by that term he intends simply physical anthropology (Ed.).]

[98] Crooke, *Tribes and Castes*, III, p. 27.

[99] Senart, *Les Castes dans l'Inde*, ch. II.

[100] Cf. Senart, *op. cit.*, p. 121; Max Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 343, 350; Jolly, *Zeitschrift der D. Morg. Gesell.*, Bd. 50, p. 507.

divided into a multiplicity of sections,[101] Sanskrit literature also shows the same multiplicity. Jolly, confirming Senart's view, cites more than forty names of "jāti" which could not be made to correspond to the four primitive "varna".[102]

Contemporary observations tend to show that the theory of four castes, the "caturvarnya" has never been more than an ideal, blending a simplified and as it were shortened picture of the reality with a reiteration of frequently violated prescriptions. It would be useless to look at the castes of the present as the descendants of the four traditional castes; the Brahmans who had the monopoly of prayer and sacrifice, the Kshatriyas, warriors born, the Vaishyas destined to commerce, the Shudras created for the service of others.

The Brahmans as we see them today correspond best to the type described in the codes but again we must mark the differences. Not only do Brahmans exercise many more professions than the Brahmanic law ordains but in addition, and most important of all, so far from constituting one caste only, as might be believed from the sacred books, they are divided into a host of castes divided the one from the other.[103] As far as the other castes are concerned the gap is even more striking. There are the Rajputs who claim descent from the Kshatriyas, but first of all, apart from the fact that many of their pretensions are obviously untrue,[104] they also form a mass of families rather than one caste.[105] The occupations assigned by tradition for the Vaishya do not appear in fact to be reserved to one caste only, but are divided amongst very diverse castes.[106] Finally it is a waste of labour to look for the caste which would correspond

[101] Fick, *Die Sociale Gliederung*, passim.

[102] Jolly, *art. cit.*, p. 515.

[103] Senart, p. 28. In the N.W. provinces alone Nesfield distinguished forty Brahman castes. *Brief View of the Caste System*, p. 49, 115. The 1,500,000 Brahmans of Bombay Province are divided, according to Enthoven, into more than two hundred groups between which marriage is forbidden (*Census of India*, 1901, IX, p. 278).

[104] Sir Alfred Lyall (*Asiatic Studies*, London, 1884, Chap. V) shows how Rajputs are made by the brahmanization of aboriginal chiefs. Crooke (*op. cit.*, p. xxii) cites a certain number of Rajput "septs" which clearly betray an aboriginal origin. Ibbetson (*Punjab Ethnogr.*, p. 421) believes so little in the purity of the blood of these claimants to Kshatriya descent that he goes so far as to say: "The term Rajput is to my mind an occupational rather than an ethnographic expression."

[105] The disinclination of the different Rajput clans to eat together will be remembered. See above, p. 25.

[106] Cf. Schröder, *Indiens Literatur und Cultur* (Leipzig, 1887), p. 419. Jolly (*Z. der Deutsch. Morg. Gesell.*, Bd 50, p. 614) proves by the names employed in the Smritis that the occupations attributed by the theory to the single caste of Vaishyas were in fact practised by very diverse groups. Cf. Fick, *op. cit.*, p. 163 sq., Engl. Transl., p. 251 sq.

to the Shudras.[107] This is why the census no longer uses these traditional names in order to distinguish the different categories of the population. One has only to look at present reality to realize that castes must be counted in their thousands. The Brahmanic theory tries in vain to conceal this essential multiplicity. The caste system has divided Hindu society into a considerable number of small opposed societies.

To sum up on these points: hereditary specialization, hierarchical organization, reciprocal repulsion: as far as any social form can realize itself in its purity, the caste system is realized in India. At the very least it penetrates Hindu society to a level unknown elsewhere. It plays some part in other civilizations but in India it has invaded the whole. It is in this sense that we may speak of the caste system as a phenomenon peculiar to India.

Does this mean that the study of the system can only have a historical and not a sociological interest? Are we limited to the particular facts without being able to glimpse any general conclusion? Because caste is only seen at its maximum development in India are we forbidden *a priori* to disengage its essential properties from their contingent circumstances and to discern the influences which it might normally have upon economic, political and moral life: We do not think so.

First of all while it is true that the caste system is, in a manner of speaking, at its height in Hindu civilization and shows there a unique and incomparable development, let us not forget that the same system is found, more or less developed, in all or in nearly all civilizations. If one wished to discover the consequences of hereditary specialization one could, on many points, compare what happens in Egypt with what happens in India. For although in Egypt it does not appear to have been an absolute rule the transmission of occupation from father to son seems to have been at least a widespread usage. In the same way a parallel between the Hindu Brahmans and the Levites might teach us something about the causes or effects of the constitution of a sacerdotal caste. Even those societies finally committed to democracy would certainly furnish plenty of material for a study of the general properties of hierarchy. The most unified societies have in their earlier periods known and for long been aware of that spirit of repulsion which maintains the whole of Hindu

[107] According to Fick (Engl. Trans., p. 314) there are no traces in Pali texts of a real caste corresponding to the theoretical Shudra caste. The officers of the modern Indian census declare almost unanimously that they have found nothing corresponding to the Vaishya caste and even less a caste of Shudras. (Cf. the results of the 1872 census summarized by Schlagintweit, *art. cit.*) Cf. Beames, *The Races of the North West Provinces*, p. 167, and Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, I, p. 271.

society in a condition of practical division. We do not, then, lack the elements for comparison: Hindu caste is, in our eyes, no more than the synthesis of elements which are present everywhere; it shows us the prolongation and, as it were, completion of lines sketched elsewhere, the unique dilation of universal tendencies.

Finally for the establishing of an induction, even more important than the superficial comparison of numerous instances, what could be more valuable than the searching analysis of the distinctive case?[108] It is fortunate for sociological curiosity that the caste system has triumphed in India over all the forces which elsewhere have thwarted or suppressed it, and that it has clearly imposed its form upon the whole of social life: in this way its distinctive properties are clearly manifest. Because it has realized itself as perfectly and as completely as possible in this civilization we are able to examine it, so to say, in its "pure state", and the more clearly able to observe its characteristics. India is the favoured land of the caste system: for this reason the history of India is, in a way, a crucial experience for anyone who wishes to submit that system to a sociological study.

[108] It was by the analysis of the distinctive case of the American democracies that Tocqueville brought to light the principal political, economic, moral, religious and even literary effects of the progress of the idea of human equality.

COMMENTED SUMMARY OF THE FIRST PART OF BOUGLÉ'S *ESSAIS*

What justification is there for drawing the attention of the sociological public to Bouglé's work more than fifty years after it was published? It is based for the most part upon material collected in the 19th century and Bouglé himself had no first hand experience of the facts which he discusses. It might well be thought that such a work was out of date when compared with subsequent publications and the amount of field-work which has been done since the late war. The books of Professor Ghurye and Professor Hutton[1] appear comprehensive and both are based upon more modern material as well as the authors' own knowledge. Nevertheless it is our experience that apart from much valuable information about what happens and can happen in Hindu society, the student emerges from a reading of these works still without having gained a clear idea of the caste system. Particularly from Professor Hutton's book he derives an impression of immense complexity and inconsistency in Hindu life which appears to defy any kind of systematic understanding. It is not surprising, if, in reaction, he turns for enlightenment to this or that particular field study and feels that he will only begin to understand Hindu society when a large enough number of such studies has been made. But even here he must be disappointed for each author posits caste at the outset and then goes on to speak of his particular, local experience. In this way the caste system itself becomes a kind of unexamined assumption from which all the bewildering diversity follows. Professor Hutton's conclusion to his work is symptomatic (*op. cit.*, p. 164–5). He lists fifteen "of the more obvious factors... probably contributing to the emergence and develop-

[1] G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India*, Philosophical Library (New York, 1952); J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (Cambridge, 1946).

ment of the caste system". We then read of "Primitive ideas of totemism, taboo, *mana*, and soul stuff", of beliefs in magic and in reincarnation, of undefined economic factors, of conquest, culture clash, colour prejudice and the policy of priests. A blend, that is to say, of outmoded evolutionism, hypothetical history and imputed motive.

It would seem to us that if these are the only kinds of conclusion we can come to Bouglé, so far from having been surpassed, has not yet come into his own. We can safely say that no other writer on caste is nearer to modern social anthropology in his method and interests.

> What is of particular interest to us is not that which passes but that which survives; institutions stand out of the flux of events... The sociological perspective can orient historical research. (p. viii)

Whether he is examining the theories of others or comparing Hindu with Greek and Egyptian civilizations his attitude is always that of the sociologist. A theory of origins is inadequate for him if it is not at the same time an explanation of the observable present. Partial and apparent similarities between elements of two civilizations are rejected as proofs of the identity of the distinct systems from which they have been selected. We might, for instance, compare his consideration of the notion that a caste system existed in ancient Egypt (above p. 14 et sq.) with Professor Ghurye's (*op. cit.*, p. 119) and note that Bouglé not only dismisses the idea but also takes the opportunity of the comparison to bring out some distinctive qualities of the Hindu system. Throughout his Introduction his insistence upon the whole actually functioning system places him in direct line with contemporary sociology. His perception that in the caste system we have to do pre-eminently with religious ideas connected with purity links him, *via* Hocart, with the pre-occupations of modern field studies.

If, in our conclusion, we are obliged to modify Bouglé's argument we do so in accordance with his own principles. Sophisticated as the Durkheimian notion of evolution was, to the extent that it allowed of a movement into the diachronic it remained a stumbling block for those under his immediate influence. Bouglé, whose modernity is striking in many ways could scarcely be expected to transcend entirely the spirit of his times.

Having established in his Introduction the organizing principles of the caste system Bouglé devotes the first part of his work to a consideration of the roots, as he calls them, of the system. It would seem here that in his

use of the word "root" he is implicitly dissociating himself from any simple search for origins without for all that totally repudiating all interest in the matter. The kind of conclusion to which he comes, if we may anticipate, is very different from that offered by the theories he discusses.

> If the caste system as we have defined it only bears fruit in India its roots do not descend only in Hindu soil. Its formative ideas are not peculiar to the Hindus: one cannot even maintain... that they constitute an appanage of the Aryan race; in their general traits they are a part of the common patrimony of primitive peoples. (p. 82-3)

Such a formulation taken by itself might well appear vague today, even unacceptable. The parallel passage however is in the Introduction (above p. 29) where Bouglé speaks of the uniqueness of the system and of the possibilities of comparison. His position there, in its general formulation, is one with which few would disagree. The above quotation might rather be seen as an attempt to convey, in the language of evolutionism, the central, sociological preoccupation of the functionalist. It may be reasonably doubted whether Bouglé was conscious of his position and of the conflict between his insight and his formulation. The question need not concern us. The fact remains that his critique of the various theories of caste current in his day satisfies the modern reader and throws up in its path a mass of relevant comment and observation which amplifies the more formal statement in the Introduction.

In his first chapter Bouglé is concerned to make his points in opposition to the theories of the two authors Dahlmann and Nesfield.[2] For the former castes were a development of the ancient professional guilds while for the latter:

> These hereditary classes (i.e. castes) were and are simply the concrete embodiments of those successive stages of culture which have marked the industrial development of mankind in every part of the world.

In other words the hierarchy of castes represented for him a cross section through the strata of time; the more "primitive" the occupation the lower the caste, the more advanced its technology, the higher.

Bouglé, following Senart, agrees initially with Dahlmann's dismissal of the 18th century "artificialist" theory according to which the cunning of the Brahman is a sufficient explanation of the caste system. For Dahl-

[2] Dahlmann, *Das Altindische Volkstum und seine Bedeutung für die Gesellschaftskunde* (Cologne, 1889); also *Das Mahabharata als Epos und Rechtsbuch* (Berlin, 1895): Nesfield, *op. cit.*, p. 114. [See Risley, *People of India*, for a concise statement of Nesfield's theory together with those of Sir Denzil Ibbetson and Senart. Ed.]

mann, however, it was sufficient to show that the spiritual energies of the Hindus were not exhausted by their emphasis upon sacrifice for the importance of sacrifice itself to be left on one side in a consideration of the origin and essence of the caste system. The development of commercial interests in India led to the formation of industrial and professional guilds which in the course of time have petrified into castes. These guilds formed under the pressure of economic necessity in their turn provided the model for other occupational groups which, in their turn, "petrified" in a similar manner. This theory, says Bouglé, would provide a striking confirmation of materialist philosophies of history. His treatment of it is interesting. Whereas a modern critic might simply dismiss the evolutionary supposition and so hope to have dealt with the materialist essence at the same time, Bouglé concentrates upon the materialist implication. For the similarity of castes and guilds to be exact he asks whether one should not find for every professional distinction a corresponding caste and on the other hand that the only distinctions between castes were professional ones? The fact that members of the same caste practise different occupations and that distinctions between castes are as frequently based upon locality or religious differences as upon occupational ones appears at first sight to disprove the theory. But for Bouglé this is not sufficient since despite all variations the rule that each caste should have its occupation remains, and any number of exceptions do not efface this obligation. Moreover the existence of one powerful institution in a society frequently results in the fact that other institutions of diverse origins and functions model their constitutions upon it. The "habit of caste" may have been imposed by the guild upon which territorial or religious groupings modelled themselves. The point to be settled is whether in fact the specialization brought about by the development of industry had the power to provide this model.

Senart had opposed this theory by pointing out that the natures of the ties which united the individuals in the two kinds of grouping were so different as to make any comparison impossible, Bouglé takes the opportunity of Senart's distinction to transcend the comparison. Unilateral associations, he points out, limited to one particular function are found only in the highly complex modern societies. Traditionally in East and West such associations tended to be more "global" than "unilateral". The commercial guilds of India, like those of England and Germany in the middle-ages were not purely economic but also religious, feasting, and mutual aid societies. They were as much concerned with the social morals of their members as with their professional duties. The scope of the guild

is then wider than Senart supposed if still narrower than that of caste. But the fact of this very similarity casts doubt on Dahlmann's thesis. The elaborate rules in guilds and the spread of their interests which make them appear similar to castes do not result from their economic foundation but rather from the traditions, religious and secular, which dominated the whole social organization of the middle-ages. The idea that one could constitute an association lacking complete jurisdiction, communal feasts and common patron saint, came much later and was quite alien to the times.

Bouglé concludes his first chapter with an examination of Nesfield's theory in relation to the three principles of the system noted in the Introduction. As far as hereditary specialization is concerned he points out, following Comte, that wherever one has an industry based upon true "manu-facture" instead of "machino-facture" the artizan must himself instruct his successor, but to say that the master must have his apprentice is not to say that the son must necessarily succeed the father. The obligatory nature of hereditary specialization in the caste system still remains unexplained. It is more likely, says Bouglé (his caution is characteristic), that in order to understand the distribution of occupations in India we have to go to beliefs of a religious nature and to some idea analogous to the *tabu* placed upon certain kinds of work among other peoples.

In his assessment of Nesfield's theory as it explains the hierarchical organization of society, Bouglé takes the opportunity to be a little more specific on the subject of the religious ideas the importance of which he has previously stressed. Undoubtedly, says Bouglé, the sheer technical complexity or delicacy of certain kinds of work is not irrelevant to Hindu ideas of status but other considerations weigh more heavily. First and foremost the pre-eminence of the Brahman cannot be explained by any economic determinism. Undoubtedly the Brahman with his power of prayer and sacrifice is useful to the Hindu but not in any "utilitarian" sense. Such powers have nothing to do with technological advance or with the advent of metallurgy by which Nesfield sets such store. As Nesfield himself points out the status of a caste depends upon its relation with the Brahmans and in addition many other factors enter into account. To cite two of the examples which Bouglé gives: metal workers are indeed of a relatively high status but the Lohar (blacksmith) is inferior to the Sonar (goldsmith) because iron is black and hence inauspicious to the Hindu while gold and silver are believed to be a combination of the two most pure elements – fire and water. Again, Barbers employ metal

instruments but are nevertheless degraded because of the blood and hair which their occupation obliges them to touch.

On hierarchy Bouglé concludes:

> Social precedence is determined less by the utility or difficulty of occupations, than by their relative purity or impurity... Each civilization has its preferred manner of classifying occupations and no doubt the manner in which it makes this classification best expresses its most intimate tendencies. In Hindu civilization it is above all religious ideas rather than economic values which establish the rank of each group.

Finally as far as reciprocal repulsion is concerned Nesfield's theory offers no explanation at all. To explain the endogamy of castes he has to take refuge in Brahmanic inventions. In this way he reintroduces the "artificialist" hypothesis which the theory of caste-guilds was intended to eliminate.

In his second chapter Bouglé turns to a comparison of caste and family and here he is concerned with Senart's theory that the prototype of the modern caste is the ancient Aryan family. Bouglé takes the opportunity of Senart's argument to insist upon a sociological as opposed to the philological 'explanation' from the Indo-European hypothesis.

Senart rejected the *varna* scheme as a prototype for caste as the division of society into classes is common while the separation into castes is unique. The present exclusivism of castes is only an ancient memory of the isolation of the clans. According to Senart we have merely to look at the material upon the Aryan societies, Greece and Rome, sisters by race of Hindu society, in order to observe the whole evolution. There we find the family as a religious group concerned to preserve the purity of the cult; the sanctity of the family hearth; the ban upon strangers although later forgotten is preserved both in Greece and Rome on the occasion of funerals; here also we find the concern to preserve the pure blood of the patrician due not merely to the pride of the nobility but also to the dictates of sacred law. Constantly we find the imprint of ancient Aryan ideas upon the modern caste system and for Senart this is sufficient to prove the direct descent of caste from the Aryan family.

Bouglé deals with this theory in two stages: first he asks whether caste is built upon the structure of the family and secondly whether this structure is necessarily that of the Aryan family. Here again we note in passing Bouglé's shift from origins and derivations to a consideration of principles and structures without for all that making his change explicit.

Bouglé deals with the second point first. The major objection to

Senart's thesis is that he appears to think that the restrictions which weigh so heavily upon the Hindu and Aryan alike are peculiar to them. Bouglé, drawing for the most part upon Robertson Smith's material[3] points out that many of the qualities which Senart singles out as distinctively Aryan are in fact common to most if not all primitive societies. Thus the connection of idea between commensality and kinship is found among the Semites. As regards endogamy there is no need for us to follow in detail Bouglé's demonstration that this, as a principle, is not unique to the Aryan stock. In general Bouglé takes his stand against what he calls the "Aryan mirage" according to which a whole set of ideas and institutions are made the appange of a race and he rejects that part of Senart's thesis which rests solely upon Aryan evidence.

But again, says Bouglé, if we are to speak of the family we have to understand what we mean. It would be unwise to imagine that any given caste derives from the descendants of one man and that its members are actual consanguines. The idea of kinship is present in the organisation of caste but to say kinship is not to say necessarily consanguinity for we may be dealing with fictional kinship. Even if we allow the possibility of actual lineages having been the precursors of castes we are bound to extend the group beyond that of the single line of pure consanguines. One major objection to not doing so is the flat contradiction which we observe between the *gens* and the caste in the matter of marriage. The first is as rigorously exogamous as the second is endogamous. Senart is lead thus to admit that caste is rather the union of several *gentes* than the prolongation of one *gens*. Thus if we are to say that the caste is modelled upon the family we must further admit that the family has also provided the model for the larger secondary groups, tribes or clans whatever they may be. Caste is endogamous, then, in the image of the larger groups of relatives, tribes or clans rather than in that of the narrower group of consanguines.

Bouglé's argument is highly tentative here and not altogether easy to follow. Senart's formulation is finally that the larger groups of kin – tribe and clan – copy the family organization and extend it. Bouglé does not make the criticism that this does not overcome the incompatibility of *gens* exogamy and caste endogamy. He turns rather to throw doubt upon the assumption that the family is the primary group and wonder whether in fact the family is not a later development from the larger group. He concludes that a final decision must wait upon a more precise definition and classification of these primitive groups.

[3] Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, Gifford Lectures, 1890.

The only thing that to us seems established is that a spirit common to these (primitive) societies has survived in caste and that the religious scruples of all kinds which lead them to recoil the one from the other, naturally explain to us those which still today isolate the castes in India.

One has the impression that in his first two chapters Bouglé has been skirmishing with his problem and, under the appearance of formal attack, establishing certain strategic points from which to make his own final approach. It is then in his third chapter, "Hierarchy and the Priesthood" that he attempts to formulate his own frankly tentative conclusions.

The chapter opens as follows:

The domination of the ancient familial exclusivism explains why the Hindu castes do not interpenetrate: it remains to be explained why we see them classified according to rank. For to say opposition is not necessarily to say superimposition.

The Brahman, says Bouglé, is the corner stone of the house. However diverse castes may be, and however firmly closed the one to the other, all admit the superiority of the Brahman. If it is some sense of relatedness which keeps one caste apart from another and exclusive, it is the Brahman caste alone which is able to break through this exclusivism. This is seen when the Brahman presides at the principal family ceremonies and even on occasion represents the ancestors. As Jolly pointed out[4] in the case of murder, compensation initially paid to the kin of the murdered man is finally paid to the Brahman. On more than a few points the Brahman arrogates to himself the powers of the primitive family. We would note that here also Bouglé is offering what amounts to a structural principle in the language of evolutionism.

The discussion continues with a description of the powers of the Brahmans and a comparison with priesthood in other civilizations from which he concludes that nowhere else has priesthood been elevated to such a position of superiority over secular power. How, he asks, are we to explain this unprecedented power? He considers the various possibilities leading finally to the value of sacrifice in Hindu civilization; in the course of his examination he makes various valuable points.

He starts by pointing out that the lack of a conception of the "State" despite the historic existence of several great empires has favoured the unhampered development of priestly power.[5] But it is not to be supposed,

[4] *Recht und Sitte*, p. 127.

[5] See Varma, *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations* (Benares, 1954), pp. 11–14.

he points out, that the Brahmans offer an alternative organization to the state. Such an organization implies some hierarchy in the ecclesiastical sense, some ceremony of ordination, some conscious principle of election or selection. Such ideas are totally alien to the Brahman. Bouglé quotes Burnouf's hypothetical Brahman replying to someone who spoke to him of ordination:

> It is the masculine principle that has made me as I am: my father was a Brahman and thus so am I. I could not stop being one even if I wished since it is the law of my being, a law which was imposed upon me even before my birth in the womb of a Brahman mother where a Brahman father sowed the seed whence I sprang... Our first fathers have transmitted to us their children that power which we hold of them; since the generation of each Brahman is in all things the same as that of another, we cannot understand how a priest can command another priest and impose upon him a faith of which he is neither the first author nor the unique interpreter.[6]

If the Brahmans may be described as priests without a Church and hence do not derive their strength from their organization can we, Bouglé asks, find the secret of their dominance in their dogma? *A priori* this is unlikely. "Where there is no (ecclesiastical) hierarchy", says Zeller, "all dogma considered as a general rule of faith, is in advance impossible since there is no organ to formulate or maintain it."[7] Indeed, says Bouglé, what is remarkable about Brahmanism is not its rigidity so much as its flexibility. It is in fact impossible to define Hinduism in terms of dogma and its orthodoxy is expressed in rites rather than in beliefs. In a word, respect for the Brahman combined with the observance of caste custom constitutes the essence of Hinduism. It is a religion without a Church and without a dogma. In this way one comes to understand the lack of missionary zeal among the Brahmans and, at the same time, the nature of conversion to Hinduism. The Brahman is a complete stranger to the idea that there is one religious truth good for the whole world and he freely admits that each people has its gods. The conversion of a tribe, for example, to Hinduism is not conversion to a dogma but the acceptance of caste duties among which is respect for the Brahman.

Finally Brahman power is not dependent upon wisdom or virtue in any particular Brahman, desirable as such qualities may indeed be considered. Such a qualification would be incompatible with the hereditary principle according to which priests are born not made.

Bouglé comes, then, to examine the basis of the respect for the Brah-

[6] Bouglé, p. 73 (Burnouf, *Essai sur le Veda*, p. 283–285).
[7] *Philosophie des Grecs* (French translation), I, p. 54.

man. He considers briefly the racial theory which would correlate distinction with race, and caste rank with varying degrees of Aryan purity and suppose the Brahmans to be the most racially pure caste. He rejects this theory and substitutes for an actual and historic purity of race an *ideal* of racial purity which has survived miscegenation in the actuality.

> The Brahmans are reputed the best of all to respect this ideal and to obey the most strictly the laws of endogamy, it is natural that they are regarded as the most faithful specimens of the Aryan type; thus the particular prestige of the Brahman might have come first of all and in part from the general prestige of Aryan blood. (p. 78)

It is perhaps unfortunate that Bouglé has here, however lightly, rested upon the Aryan theory, for his subsequent discussion shows that he conceives of this ideal of purity in more than racial terms. He points out that it is not only their respect for endogamy that wins prestige for the Brahmans. Purity is not lost only by miscegenation but also by eating with others, by eating certain foods, by touching certain objects or persons. It is because they are said to be the most careful in these matters that they are also respected the most. They are consecrated to the realization of an ideal which every caste, with more or less success, strives to achieve in part; in a sense the Brahmans represent and incarnate the ideal. This explains, Bouglé adds in a foot-note, the zeal with which lower castes imitate the Brahmans:

> In the hope of rising in the scale of purity we see low castes adopt and scrupulously respect some custom 'launched' by the Brahmans. Thus have been spread from caste to caste the custom of child marriage and the interdiction upon widow remarriage. (p. 79, f. 2)

The Brahmans are considered to be the most scrupulous in preserving their purity but why is their purity so important? Other castes are frequently no less scrupulous but nevertheless they continue to give precedence to the Brahman. In order to understand this, says Bouglé, we have to look at the function which the Brahmans perform. They are the "guardians of sacrifice" and this is no doubt the source of their privilege.

> It is natural that a people who have magnified more than any other the action of sacrifice upon the order of the world should also have regarded the reaction of the sacrifice upon the sacrificer. He who speaks to the gods appears to be a god himself: he who lights the sacred fire becomes *agneya*, a participant in the nature of fire. In these ideas, upon which rest at once the infinite superiority of the Brahmans and the hierarchy of Hindu castes we once more recognize primitive ideas carried to their highest power. (pp. 81–2)

To the modern reader Bouglé's conclusion must be disappointing. In his argument he has above all stressed the importance of understanding the system as a whole; he has emphasized the role of religion in this system; finally he has shown that both in the relations between castes and in the value set upon Brahmanic ideals, it is ideas of purity and impurity which play a decisive part. At this point, however, Bouglé asks himself the wrong question and consequently receives the wrong answer. He notes that other castes are no less rigorous in their pursuit of purity and that therefore the preeminence of the Brahman must rest on some factor additional to the rigorous pursuit of purity. Here we would point out that the reported behaviour of non-Brahman castes is a fact of a different order from the reputed behaviour of the ideal Brahman. By comparing the two at the same level Bouglé appears to be violating that very distinction between ideal and behaviour to which he draws our attention in the Introduction (above p. 20). Faced, then, with what he regards as a problem, Bouglé separates the Brahmans from the system in order to find the reason for their distinctive position. It might be objected that this is only done as it were temporarily and that the Brahman is later reintegrated through a consideration of sacrifice. Three points may be made here. Firstly the lower caste for whom the Brahman does not sacrifice continues to respect the Brahman. If it desires the services of the Brahman these services are but part of a syndrome of which the integrating factor applies no less to the Brahmans themselves. Secondly sacrifice as a mystical act related to the order of the universe cannot be said to be *more* stressed in Hindu civilization than in any other society. Thirdly within Hindu society a non-Brahman blood sacrifice is no less important, simply as a sacrifice for those who perform it, than a vegetarian sacrifice performed by a Brahman. In invoking the mysterious power of sacrifice and the awe which the Hindus have of it Bouglé is accepting not merely the theory of the people themselves but the theory which, according to Brahmanic texts, they ought to have. "Such notions throw no light upon the phenomena which it is proposed to explain, they participate in them."[8] Moreover it is clear that Bouglé has passed into a diachronic perspective in order to infer the present from the past. Certainly we have stressed the importance of classical and linguistic studies to the development of an Indian sociology[9] but this fruitful collaboration is impossible if the two necessarily discrete points of view are confused to offer what is, implicitly,

[8] Lévi-Strauss on Mauss' discussion of *mana* in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* by M. Mauss (Paris, 1950), p. xlv.

[9] *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. I, p. 1 et seq.

a reanimated theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

It is however possible to develop Bouglé's argument and to see in his perceptions a possible formulation which could, in a sense, articulate the three elements he has described. In order to do this we have to turn in our tracks and to consider certain implications of his use of words. It will have been seen that in his Introduction Bouglé chooses to speak of "elements" to designate what we might prefer to call the organizing principles of the caste system and which he himself occasionally calls tendencies. This use of the word element is revealing for Bouglé does not, as we have seen, go beyond a consideration of them as elements. Despite his final attempt to integrate them in accordance with the indigenous intellectual model, he leaves us at the end with three elements of which the integrating principle is yet to be found.

Connected with this criticism we may doubt Bouglé's use of the word "repulsion" as a preferred term for what elsewhere (p. 82) he calls the principle of the opposition of castes and has described in his Introduction as such (above p. 16). It is clear from the context in which he uses it, when he speaks of the disgust which the European is said to inspire in the orthodox Brahman (above p. 24), that he is not using it only in the manner of the physicist but rather in its emotive sense as describing attitudes which prevail between castes. He has then moved from a consideration of the system to a consideration of the attributes of the parts. It might be said that this is a quibble for we can find grounds in Bouglé for translating "reciprocal repulsion" as mutual opposition and thus solve the difficulty. But unfortunately Bouglé's preference for the term seems to have connection with other difficulties in his argument. He illustrates this "element" of reciprocal repulsion with the observation that "in the eyes of an orthodox Hindu any caste, other than his own, is in a sense impure" (above p. 25). At the level of which he has been speaking, that is to say of the system, how can a caste continue to regard a superior caste as pure while "in a sense" regarding it as impure? The paradox is one that we have elicited. It is not, naturally, offered by Bouglé. To account for this is it not possible that we have to take into account the times in which Bouglé wrote?

Today the kind of dichotomy perpetuated by Radcliffe-Brown between religion and society, as though religion were more of a *thing* than a *representation*, is not uncritically accepted. If then Bouglé might appear to oppose religion and society in this manner we should not forget that at the time he wrote the very relevance of religious beliefs in social life had to be defended. This having been said we cannot help but see that, in his use

of words he tends to dissociate what is insolubly joined in the caste system. Beliefs about purity and impurity (religion) are related for him to the mutual opposition of groups. Hierarchy (society) remains to be explained. Superiority is not *necessarily* superior purity.

As is apparent Bouglé is not simple-minded and, at a later stage of his argument he shows himself aware of the possibility of finding, by way of an examination of the religious facts, "the principle of the opposition of castes or that of their superimposition" (p. 82). Again in his discussion of Nesfield it is clear that he sees that ideas of purity and impurity are associated with the Brahman and with hierarchy. But finally and possibly for the reasons that we have suggested he seems to sheer away from this association and to account for elements in isolation by referring hierarchy and mutual opposition separately to two different kinds of religious idea. Thus we have his formulation towards the close of the third chapter:

> It is the habit of the closed cult of the primary familial groups which prevents the castes from mixing: it is respect for the mysterious effects of sacrifice which finally subordinates them to the priestly caste. (p. 82)

When this criticism has been made we are able to see how important are the moments at which Bouglé tacitly oversteps his divisions. Immediately prior to his discussion of the Brahman as sacrificer he shows that the Brahman's superior status is firmly related to those regulations that Bouglé would formally associate with the closed familial cult – endogamy and commensality (p. 38). All his arguments and the data which he handles point, in fact, towards what we might call, using the language of Mauss,[10] an *a priori* synthetic opposition of the pure and the impure. For this is indeed the basic "judgement" underlying and explaining the three elements of the caste system. The opposition is not one of simple contraries but implies a hierarchy. Given the hierarchic superiority of purity, opposition and segmentation are also implied. This formula working within the field of occupation gives us also the theory of, or belief in, hereditary specialization but not of course the concrete form which this theory will take in any given situation.

The term "hereditary specialization" may well be one which future research will call up for re-examination. The number of castes in any area whose "nature" it is to be ritual specialists under the rubric of pure and impure occupations is relatively few. We have to distinguish them from a wider circle of castes who nevertheless come within the traditional *jajmāni* system in which religious and economic values are articulated together.

[10] See *op. cit.*, p. 117, and Lévi-Strauss' comment, p. xliii–v.

Beyond this again we find those purely economic relationships which are, in a sense, modelled upon the *jajmāni* system. These appear no different from those relationships commonly observed in traditionalist societies where economic relationships are formulated in terms of patron and client. Connected with this is the further complexity that "hereditary specialization" as a feature of the caste system goes beyond any consideration of purity or, strictly speaking, true specialization. The traditional occupation of a caste may be said to be agriculture but this is clearly a very different kind of specialization from that of the barber or the washerman. It could be said to be only an ascribed specialization, only significant as a name.

Occupation, then, is understood in terms of our fundamental opposition but of its very nature and involvement in the economic it draws our attention to the profane elements in Hindu society. The highest value of the caste system is incarnate in the Brahman and at the same time the Brahman is the servant of one or many masters. We may examine the problem implied here in a consideration of Hocart's work which, in a manner, complements the work of Bouglé.

A. M. HOCART ON CASTE—RELIGION AND POWER

Hocart's work on caste first appeared in a French translation published in 1938.[1] In his introduction to that edition Marcel Mauss draws attention to the sympathy and interest which Hocart felt for French thought and for sociology in particular. Mauss's politeness here oversteps itself for it draws our attention to the astonishing fact that Hocart nowhere in his work makes any reference to Bouglé to whom, in fact, Mauss particularly alludes in the Introduction. Whether Hocart's neglect of Bouglé was accidental or not it cannot be denied that the two minds were sharply opposed in many ways. Bouglé inevitably limited to written material handles it from the outside systematically and sociologically but with the limitations that we have already noted. Hocart with first hand experience and a creative, synthesizing imagination makes every endeavour to enter the minds of the people themselves to present the caste system as a meaningful and understandable system.

Hocart's work is entitled *Caste – a comparative study*, and in addition to India Hocart draws upon his experience in Ceylon, in the Pacific, notably in Fiji, and in Egypt. There are also sections on ancient Rome and Greece. In this discussion we limit ourselves to the long section on India, for it is both permissible and desirable that we should do so if Hocart's contribution to our understanding of Indian society is to be appreciated. For him caste in India is only one variety of a widely spread *genus* and he offers the definition that "castes are merely families to whom various offices in the ritual are assigned by heredity" (p. 20). We would draw attention to the fact that here Hocart is defining *castes*, that is to say

[1] *Les Castes* (Paris, 1938). English edition, *Caste* (London, 1950). Our quotations are from the English edition.

the units of the system seen as individuals. He is not attempting to define the system as Bouglé did. We do not rule out altogether the possibilities of comparison between castes thus seen and similar groupings in, say, Fiji but this must take place at a level in which we are not at present interested. At the moment we are concerned with the light which Hocart threw upon the caste system as a unique phenomenon in India. To move from this level to that of comparison is inevitably to violate that uniqueness, to isolate the parts from the whole and to see the castes as abstracted groups. We shall have occasion later to note that Hocart's interest in comparison leads him occasionally to make this abstraction and we shall see, nevertheless, that this enables us to develop our understanding of the actuality beyond the point to which Bouglé led us.[2]

Hocart opens his work by praising Senart, characteristically, for having dismissed two occidental theories of caste – the occupational and racial theories – and he insists that once we have divested ourselves of preconceived notions we must recognize that caste derives from some other principle which we have not as yet understood.

> We must search for that principle not in our minds, but in the minds of those people who practise the caste system, who have daily experience of it, and are thus most likely to have a feeling for what is most essential in it. (p. 3)

He goes on to examine the statements of three Tamil informants in Ceylon and sees that their own emphasis is upon service or rather upon a variety of particular services which various castes render to a master caste. Hocart next examines the nature of these services and takes as his example the Drummer caste of Ceylon. He shows that the Drummer is much more than the man who beats the drum, "drumming is not the essence of the calling, but only one manifestation of that essence". The Drummer's occupation is essentially a religious one. Furthermore this religious service carries with it a status for the Drummer is associated with an inferior cult. Hocart shows that the Tamils of Ceylon distinguish clearly between musicians and drummers, the former being associated with auspicious occasions, the latter "familiar to us all under the name of Pariahs" being associated with the inauspicious, with bloodsacrifice and

[2] As a comparativist Hocart's procedure is understandable. We would distinguish sharply between him and Professor Hutton in this matter. Hutton is content to define the caste system by the characteristics of the parts and this despite his frequent references to Bouglé's work. If Hocart isolates the *jāti* as families with hereditary ritual duties it is in order to compare them with similar families outside India. Quite distinct is his appreciation of the integrity of the whole from which he has isolated them.

with death. He concludes that the Drummers are a kind of priests, low in status because their cult is low "albeit necessary" (p. 10).[3] From this consideration of the Drummers we pass to the Barbers, Washermen and Potters. Again Hocart shows that the English translation of the name does not adequately convey the nature of the occupation performed nor in any way explain the status of the caste concerned. The occupations are in essence religious and the status of the first two castes is low because this religious function is associated with birth, menstruation and death which are conceived of as polluting. The exigences with which the Barber and Washerman deal are not merely recognized as inevitable in the natural sense. Hocart shows that we are dealing with a system that takes social cognisance of these inevitabilities and transforms them, in a sense, into necessities. Quoting one of his Tamil witnesses he says: "Practically on every occasion . . . the barber and washerman will have to be present. They are called the children of the family." (p. 10). We have here the foreshadowing of what Professor Srinivas later observed at a Coorg ceremony when at a certain point particular emphasis is laid upon the completeness of the assembly, a completeness which includes "the one who stays outside (Poleyas)".[4] In the matter of status Hocart takes the practice of therapy to show that functions which are associated under a general head in western eyes are clearly dissociated according to ideas of impurity in the caste system and that the status of the practitioners are established according to these ideas: "the potters . . . deal with dislocated bones and all kinds of fractures, leaving boils, wounds, and tumours to the barbers." Both Potter and Barber have functions in ordinary day to day physical therapy but to the inferior caste are reserved those cases in which blood and suppuration are involved.

So far in his argument Hocart has established that the caste system can only be understood when we realize that it is permeated by essentially religious conceptions and further that these religious conceptions are based upon a social apprehension of the opposition of the pure and the impure. His own conclusion at this stage is as follows:

> The conclusion we have arrived at on modern evidence is that the caste system is a sacrificial organization, that the aristocracy are feudal lords constantly

[3] For our later discussion we have to bear in mind at this point that the "necessity" of this inferior cult is of a structural nature which we formulate for our understanding. It is not a "necessary cult" in the sense that Brahmans, or Hindu thought more generally, regard it as essential. Indeed, considered as an isolated process, Brahmanization would lead to the elimination of inferior cults thus understood.

[4] *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford, 1952), p. 201.

involved in rites for which they require vassals or serfs, because some of these services involve pollution from which the lord must remain free. (p. 17)

This formulation is open to two objections which must be made at the outset if we are to distinguish the valuable from the less valuable in Hocart's work. First of all it is a little surprising to find this sudden emphasis upon sacrifice which is one particular kind of religious act in a society dominated by religious ideas. When in the preceding pages we read that "the drummers are a kind of priests" or heard a Tamil informant say that the Barber "is like a priest on the cremation ground", we gave full value to the phrases "a kind of" and "is like a", that is to say we appreciated that this was a way of saying that these people have religious functions. In this sense "every occupation is a priesthood" and in some, notably that of the barber on the cremation ground, the religious function is particularly striking. Such an interpretation was justified and consequently we are equally justified in objecting to the movement from the generally religious system to the particular religious act, sacrifice which involves a particular priest, the Brahman. In abstract Hocart's conclusion so far, falls short of his preceding demonstration to the extent that it offers the part as the characteristic of the whole. This carries us to our second objection and here again we have to reconsider an earlier observation. Hocart spoke of the emphasis laid upon service by his informants,

The farmers of one village make the following statement: "The people of Kadurpitya are drummers. They are like servants: when called they must come for dancing, festivals, processions. The farmers give the drummers food on a leaf, also cash for their hard work. When drummers come for a propitiation ceremony they are given clothes; only then. (p. 8)

Here Hocart is describing an important matter of fact[5] of a politico-economic nature but goes on immediately to ask "What kind of service?" The answer to this question leads to the emphasis upon religion and the analysis of status which we have briefly summarized. The idea of "service" is valuable so long as it remains an idea so that we can see that there is some association of duty with caste. But Hocart has, in the passage previously cited, elevated one politico-economic relationship to characterize a system of which he himself has emphasized the religious nature. Put briefly, even if we accepted the phrase "sacrificial organization" we could not accept its immediate inflection with the particular rites of the feudal lords. To do so would be not merely to accept the part for the

[5] Cf. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. I, p. 31.

whole but also to confuse facts of behaviour with facts of value. We shall have occasion to return to this point later.

The dangers consequent upon this emphasis on sacrifice may be seen from the sections which follow (IV and V). Hocart asks the question: "How far is this conception ancient?" and with a determination to answer "It is" draws his evidence promiscuously from a variety of ancient texts of very different periods to insist upon the importance of sacrifices performed at the behest of the king or at his consecration. To give a sociological significance to this sacrifice Hocart offers the king as a divine figure concerned to maintain the "life" of his people. In this way the observed opposition of the pure and the impure gives way to a much more vague conception of the conflict between the forces of life and the forces of death. The argument, then, so far from throwing further light upon the observable system obscures our perspective. We have passed from a systematic consideration of religious values to the ideologies maintained by various Indian priesthoods at different stages of the development of Hindu civilization from Vedism to Hinduism. One example should be sufficient to establish our point. Having said that caste is a sacrificial organization and that the important sacrifice is the king's sacrifice Hocart goes on to say that "castes are born of the ritual" and that "caste proceed(s) from the sacrifice" (p. 21). This is supported by references to Manu and to the Rigveda where these refer to religious beliefs about initiation. "Every son of a brahman is born of his father, but he is also born of the sacrifice, and so is every *kṣatriya* and so is every farmer." (*ibid.*). Even supposing that we were dealing with ascertainable historic fact here we have learned nothing about the contemporary caste system. Were we to accept Manu's doctrinal imperatives, for example, as the criteria for defining a caste, as Hocart appears to do, we should find it very difficult to account for the absence of and indifference to the sacred-thread in many parts of modern India where, nevertheless, we observe local hierarchies based upon the fundamental opposition of the pure to the impure.

The contemporary reader is gratified to pass from sections IV and V to the following discussion of *varṇa* for in this Hocart shows himself at his best. Here texts are used not as historical evidence with which it is presumed that the present must accord but rather as offering certain systems of ideas with which the present may be compared. The prodecure is in a sense quite the opposite of the preceding one.

The understanding of *varṇa* and its relation to actually existing groups

is a problem which has bedevilled students of Hindu society since the time of the Abbé Dubois. Two simple solutions are offered. The first is that of the reformer and idealist; for him the *varṇa* classes are the reality which have been corrupted by later divisions and the imposition of later ideas. The second might be characterized as positivist: with a plausible show of empiricism the positivist discounts the *varṇa* scheme as a figment of priestly arrogance or as an earlier social form and lays his emphasis upon the existing social groups, the *jāti*. This is not the place to raise objections to the first formulation; the second, by reason of its apparent commonsense, is tempting to the field-worker. But such an approach raises unnecessary difficulties. Logically carried out, as it never is, we should have to pretend to ourselves that India is a mere geographical entity similar to Africa and that a study conducted in Mysore is as relevant to one carried out in U.P. as the results of work among the Bantu are to an understanding of the Nilotes. Nobody in fact works on this assumption, everybody on the contrary speaks of caste, the caste system, Brahmans and Untouchables. Professor Srinivas' description of purity and impurity among the Coorgs makes not only for a clarification of concepts (as one might compare the term lineage as applied to the Tallensi of the Gold Coast and the Nuer of the Sudan) but also for an immediate field understanding throughout India.

The significance of Srinivas' contribution is here relevant for he is far from adopting any simplicist attitude to the problem of *varṇa* and if he does not solve it he at least points its extreme complexity.

> The idea of caste as the fivefold division of society represents a gross oversimplification of facts. The real unit of the caste system is not one of the five *varṇas*, but *jāti*... There are innumerable *jātis*. Professor Ghurye (Caste and Race in India 1932, p. 27) calculates that there are 2,000 sub-castes (*jātis*) in each linguistic area... The importance of the *varṇa*-system consists in that it furnishes an All-India frame into which the myriad *jātis* in any single linguistic area can be fitted. It systematizes the chaos of *jātis* and enables the sub-caste of one region to be comprehended by people in another area by reference to a common scale. Further, the *varṇa*-system represents a scale of values, and *jātis* occupying the lower rungs have throughout tried to raise their status by taking over the customs and ritual of the top *jātis*. This has helped the spread of a uniform culture throughout Hindu society.
>
> The attempt to fit the *jātis* of any region into the fivefold hierarchy is a very difficult affair. It is possible everywhere to say who are the Brahmins and Untouchables, but there is great confusion in the middle regions. (*op. cit.*, pp. 24–5)

It is still difficult to accept this formulation. The conception of an All-India frame does not seem quite satisfactory since the *varṇa* scheme cannot

be said to systematize chaos as between two regions if it has not first systematized confusion in one. Neither for the people themselves nor for the sociologist can it do this. Indeed, as Professor Srinivas notes a few lines later: "Disputes as to relative status are an essential feature of the caste system." Claims to status in terms of *varṇa* do not so much produce the spread of a uniform culture throughout Hindu society as demonstrate the prevalence of certain values.

But by refusing any simple resolution of his problem Srinivas draws out attention to four essential points; firstly that *varṇa* and *jāti* are intimately connected in the social reality in a manner yet to be defined; secondly that *varṇa* is related to status; thirdly the relation of *varṇa* to the status of Brahman and Untouchable in any given area appears to be univocal; fourthly that among the intermediate castes of any area status in relation to *varṇa* is essentially claimed rather than univocally ascribed or admitted.

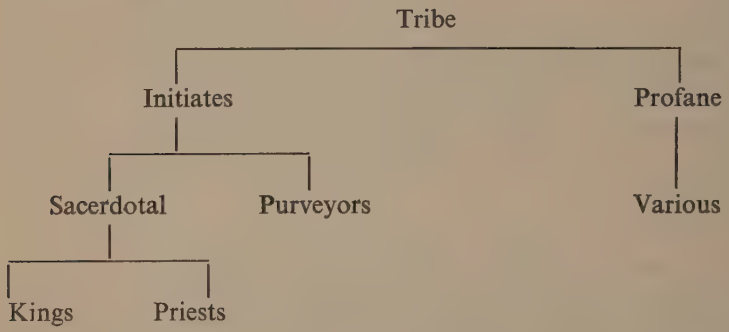
We are now in a position to return to Hocart for his consideration of *varṇa*:

> This, we are constantly told, bears no resemblance to reality. The reality is to be found in Indian censuses, in the dictionaries of castes and tribes, and in the daily experience of Indian civil servants. What do we find there? Not four castes but an infinitude, with an endless variety of customs, of mutual relations, and even of racial types. Therefore the four caste system is a pure figment, the invention of priests for their own glorification. (pp. 32–4)

Hocart, characteristically, tests out such an attitude upon English society and compares the constitutional division between lords and commons with the reality. Amongst the lords he finds differences of rank, race and "social set", he might have added the difference between titles which are hereditary and those which are not and stressed the fact that the "lords" are also the "peers" – the equals. Amongst the commons there is an even greater variety. "Do we", he asks, "on that account reject the classification into lords and commons as a figment of our constitutional theorists?" Of course we do not; he concludes: "It is a theory, but it is a theory translated into practice. Such is any social organization." Hocart goes on to insist: "Why should not such a classification (as provided by the *varṇa* scheme) be just as important in the state as ours? As a matter of fact it is much more important since it runs throughout the daily life of the masses." (p. 24). He discusses the case of the leading caste in Ceylon, the farmers, which despite marked differences of status within it occupies the traditional position of feudal lordship. His emphasis then, at this point, is not upon establishing historical links but to speak of the positions of

groups and the vital interdependence of the social actuality and the indigenous intellectual model.

The general discussion of *varṇa* is followed by an analysis of the distribution of offices in the Temple of the Tooth in Ceylon and Hocart shows that they follow the disposition of the *varṇa* in the Dharma treatises. He goes on to show, after a consideration of each *varṇa* in turn, that whether in the temple, in actual Sinhalese society or in the *varṇa* scheme as we find it in the Dharma texts a series of dichotomies appears. This he presents schematically:



What we have to preserve here is the dichtomous nature of the scheme for as it stands it is only otherwise justified by ancient literature. Even in the Vedic period it would appear to be an over simplification to assign unequivocal supremacy to the king in religious situations.[6] As far as our understanding of the present is concerned we cannot from this scheme understand the necessity, which Hocart noted earlier, of the inferior or excluded who here are, as it were, set on one side. More satisfactory, it seems to us, is Professor Dumézil's analysis which offers the *varṇa* scheme as a series of oppositions and permits us to observe a homologous structure in the *jāti* of the present.

> The *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya*... are not to be enumerated "one, two three". The *brāhmaṇa* is defined first of all in opposition to the *kṣatriya*; then both are reconciled and collaborate in a new notion of "power"... which in turn is defined in opposition to the *vaiśya*... in its turn this opposition is resolved in the synthesis *dvija*, "the twice-born" in face of which the *śūdra* emerges.[7]

The terms "power" and "twice-born" are, in this presentation, the symbols of successive syntheses. The basic opposition of the religious to non-

[6] See G. Dumézil, *Jupiter Mars Quirimus*, Vol. IV (Paris, 1948), pp. 101–106.
[7] G. Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna* (Paris, 1948), p. 76.

religious is the animating one for it is not only that the Brahman and Kshatriya are united in a notion of power but also that by virtue of the opposition the Kshatriya is also pure in opposition to the Vaishya as is the latter to the Surdra. Ultimately traditional Hindu society defines itself as pure in opposition to the impure external world.

Looked at abstractly the distinction in English constitutional theory between lords and commons provides a simple model based upon one opposition. The *varṇa* scheme being not only ideal but also doctrinal, concerned in some sense with what *ought* to be, is complex. It takes cognisance, as it were, of contradictions inherent in a society which raises the priest above the king.

Professor Srinivas has set the problem in his description of the discrepancy between the formal hierarchy of purity in his Mysore village and the actual status relationships of day-to-day life.

> Discrepancy is due to the fact that, in conceptualizing the hierarchy, ritual considerations are dominant, while in the day-to-day relationships between castes economic, political, and "Western" factors also play an important part. Thus the relation between the poor Brahman priest and the rich peasant headman of the village is a complicated one, the Brahman being aware of the secular power of the headman, and the headman showing deference to the Brahman's ritual position.[8]

To this may be added Hocart's observations in his essay on "Snobbery"[9] which draws attention to imitation in society and shows that as far as actual behaviour is concerned in India and Ceylon the model for emulation embraces at once the Brahman and the "chief". May we understand by this that there are certain secular values in the local hierarchy which complement ritual ones and determine the status of any particular caste? That Srinivas has not taken this simple way out should caution us against doing so. We may however consider Stevenson's attempt to approach the material in this way. He observes:

> The first important point to note is that there are two kinds of status – *secular* status and *ritual* status – each derived from different sources and socially manifested in different ways. The secular status of individuals within groups, and sometimes even of the groups themselves, is variable and may be determined by such criteria as occupation, skill, education, wealth, land ownership, public office and even marriage customs.[10]

[8] *Village India*, ed. McKim Marriott (*American Anthropological Association*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Part 2, Memoir No. 83, June 1955), p. 26.

[9] *The Life-giving Myth and other Essays* (London, 1952), p. 129.

[10] H. N. C. Stevenson, "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 84, parts i and ii, pp. 45–6.

Stevenson does not go on to discuss at any length the part played by these criteria of "secular status" and obviously regards them as irrelevant to his theme. Later he observes:

> There is, of course, a great range of outward symbols through which both secular and ritual status may be ascertained... symbols such as special clothes or ornaments, or houses or social rights... but they are not relevant to this essay, which is concerned with the underlying principles of evaluation and not with outward symbols which vary from group to group and which find their proper place in ethnographic studies.[11]

The passage from Srinivas which relates to Stevenson's argument reads as follows:

> Things associated with high castes, their houses, clothes, manners, and ritual, tend to become symbols of superior status. Consequently there is a ban on the lower castes taking them over and, formerly, such a ban was sanctioned by the political authority at the top. (*Coorgs*, p. 29)

It is clear from this that in the evaluation of the status of groups the association of both objects and manners is so close that one cannot dissociate them in analysis much less speak of a "secular status" which is "variable". There is one hierarchy and there can, therefore, be only one kind of status.[12]

Nevertheless in our consideration of a caste having high status we cannot help but be struck by behaviour which seems to contradict the very values upon which that status is based. From Srinivas' account of Coorg society we can see that the criteria governing status are relatively clear. The Brahmans are vegetarians and teetotallers; toddy-tapping and the taking of animal life are associated with low status. But the Coorgs themselves participate in blood-sacrifice, eat meat and drink liquor. Speaking of the non-vegetarian food offered by the Coorgs to their deities Srinivas says:

> Coorgs express the dietetic preference of their deities by saying that they "lost their caste": a certain ambivalence can be detected in this attitude, an attitude which presumably prevails towards their own diet. (*Coorgs*, p. 211)

Throughout Srinivas' account of the Coorgs we are presented by the juxtaposition of contraries as though the Coorgs themselves, in a manner of

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 50.

[12] Only when we are dealing with the confrontation of modern Indian society with the traditional caste system might it seem profitable to speak of secular values in contradistinction to religious ones. A rich Untouchable may acquire prestige and influence in the modern world of the city but not in his natal village. On the other hand a rich man of high caste only enhances his status in his village by certain approved forms of spending.

speaking, wished to present even in ritual form, the profound duality of their position. A dramatic example of this is the account of the Bhadrakali oracle (pp. 186–199). At one point in this festival the vegetarian Brahman formally withdraws from the temple while a goat is decapitated by a low caste Panika. The Brahman returns on the following morning to purify the temple and temple yard. It is clear from this and from other instances that we are dealing with complementary cults which, in a sense, express the impurity of the Coorgs in relation to the Brahmans. For although the Coorgs are the dominant caste and the Brahmans are, in a sense, dependent upon them, the Coorgs have no status at all unless the Brahmans are and can be shown to be, their superiors in accordance with the recognized values. From this instance it is clear that the Coorg does not merely tolerate or respect the Brahman as in modern society the secular government may tolerate and even respect the regulations of a religious body. The status of the Coorg rests upon the absolute purity of the Brahman in opposition to which the Coorg is impure. It is perhaps not too much to say that in this ritual the Coorg associates himself with the Untouchable in order that his superior status may ultimately be vindicated. The Brahman does not stand by helplessly while the Coorg blood-sacrifice is performed, he withdraws. His return to purify the temple is the final reaffirmation of the values for which he pre-eminently stands and upon which the whole system depends. The interdependence of the two parts of this ritual parallels the relationship of Brahman and Coorg in day-to-day affairs (*Coorgs* p. 43) and, as we shall see, the relation of Brahman to Kshatriya in the *varṇa* scheme. For the present we may note that the Coorgs are traditionally a martial caste with royal associations and even occasional royal marital ties.

Speaking of vegetarian and non-vegetarian propitiation of the ancestors Srinivas points out (*Coorgs* p. 166) that although "the more inquiring" see inconsistency here "such inconstistency does not seriously trouble anyone". He goes on to say that all over India mutually inconsistent customs and beliefs are found existing together. He then speaks of the process of "sanskritization" which has been going on "for over 2,000 years all over India". Two thousand years is a long time and even allowing for the slowness of cultural processes it is difficult to believe that a people such as the Coorgs, who were for at least two hundred years associated with the strictly vegetarian and teetotal Lingayat Rajas, should as it were wilfully continue to present such glaring inconsistencies in their religious practice. If the Brahmans were the only pole of attraction and the process of "sanskritization" only impeded by time and conservatism one would

expect if not a greater degree of cultural consistency at least a less clearly marked ambivalence. Although we may dispute with Dr. Marriott the manner in which he has formulated his observations we cannot but be grateful to him for having pointed out that "sanskritization" is countered by a complementary and hence necessary process.[13] The consistency of India lies at the level not of culture but of relations. The relation of the local dominant caste to the local Brahman caste corresponds to the complex relation of Brahman and Kshatriya in the *varṇa* scheme. They are united and opposed and so in certain aspects offer contrary models for the emulation of lower castes.[14]

Hocart's emphasis upon kingship makes his contribution to our understanding of this problem valuable. We have, however, in reading him to bear in mind that we have shifted our perspective from purity to power because for him the second tends to be the important one. From the point of view of the former the term Kshatrya is relative, from the point of view of the latter it shares in the absoluteness of the term Brahman. It is very remarkable that Hocart who has stressed the pre-eminence of religious values in this system should formally present it as an articulation around the centre of power, which, in relation to the values of this system appears as negative.

Once the scale has been readjusted Hocart's demonstration of the relation between this aspect of the *varṇa* scheme and the local hierarchy of *jāti* is one of the most important parts of his work. First of all his presentation of the word *kṣatriya* clears away several misconceptions. "It has", he says, "become a tradition to describe the *kṣatriya* caste as a warrior caste" (p. 34), but he shows that this is a tradition based upon later texts and that the primitive meaning is connected with kingship. The attribute *par excellence* of the king is the *kṣatra* which Hocart renders as the Roman *imperium*. His argument here is corroborated by Varma:

The word Kshatra or Kshatrasri or the lustre of Kshatra, is found in the Vedas. Keith translates this word by sovreignty. We can accept this translation provid-

[13] *Village India*, p. 197 et seq.

[14] The Coorgs and South India generally offer striking examples but the structure remains the same even where "inconsistency" is less apparent. In a recent lecture M. Lingat draws our attention to the *trivarga* hierarchy of values (*dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*). This is relevant to our analysis. *Artha* – the activities making for wealth upon which kingly power rests – is sub-ordinate to *dharma* but legitimate at its own level; it is inferior but necessary to the maintenance of *dharma*. It is significant that the Brahman ideally neither wields *kṣatra* nor pursues *artha*. For a discussion of *artha* in Kautilya see Varma, *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations* (Benares, 1954), p. 49 et seq. By definition the dominant caste is opposed to the Brahman as *artha* to *dharma*.

ed we understand this word in the general sense of power and do not read into it the abstract legal concept of an ultimate irresistible power of the political head... Generally speaking, in later Hindu thought the word Kshatra lost its abstract conceptual character and tended more and more to be identified with the natural qualities of the Kshatriya caste. It never attained the exalted height which the concept of Brahma attained when it came to signify the absolute... The Satapatha Brahmana says that although Kshatra and Brahma are interdependent, the Brahmin who represents Brahma can do without Kshatra but not vice-versa. (*op. cit.*, pp. 48–9)

It will be seen that in this passage Dr. Varma confirms Hocart's use of the word *imperium* for *kṣatra* while at the same time laying the corrective emphasis that we desiderated in Hocart's account.

Perhaps the best way to approach Hocart's argument is to present the relevant conclusion first. Thus on the last page of his chapter on India he says:

The king's state is reproduced in miniature by his vassals: a farmer has his court, consisting of the personages most essential to the ritual, and so present even in the smallest community, the barber, the washerman, the drummers and so forth...

This ritual organization has spread downwards to such an extent that the poor cultivators in the jungle have their retainers to play the part which they alone are qualified to play at births, weddings and funerals, but these retainers are retainers of the community, the village, not of one lord.

The process of this Hocart calls "nationalization" (p. 114) and we are justified from his material in seeing this as a organic process in the society although he implies at the same time that it is a historical one.

Given Hocart's acceptance of the ideal supremacy of the king, there is no problem here. But if Hocart's earlier emphasis upon the religious values of the system be considered we have to realize that we are not dealing here with a simple political situation but with a complex politico-religious situation for which we are as yet far from finding a satisfactory formulation.

The *imperium* or *kṣatra* of the Kshatriya is related essentially to the maintenance of a social organization (it being granted that this social order is also part of a religious cosmology). The texts reiterate that the primary duty of the Kshatriya is to preserve the status of the various groups composing the society and punish those who either derogate the status of others or who swerve from the path of their own duty. This we believe is, or rather was until recently, the position of the dominant caste in Hindu society. From all parts of India where field-work has been done we hear that the dominant castes in any given area applied physical

sanctions against attempts to change status or occupation in lower castes as recently as fifteen or twenty years ago. Further, it seems from the evidence that although Hocart is in a sense correct in saying that the retainers are the retainers of the community, the keystone in any "jajmāni" system is the dominant caste. By definition it is the caste most able to pay for a full deployment of the system whereas lower castes can afford to deploy only a part; a relevant although not final measure of the status of any given caste is its capacity to employ other castes both on ritual occasions and in a purely economic capacity.

Two points arise here: firstly the decline of the power of dominant castes in recent years has set in motion "structural" changes of which the full development is yet to be seen[15]; secondly the actual situation in any given area is variable. This one could predict *a priori* from the ecological variety of India but also it shows that we have moved from the field of All-India values to that of local behaviour and to a position where we must try to understand the relation of these two. A consideration of this leads us to the politico-religious situation already mentioned.

Without any further knowledge, the passage which we have cited from Dr. Varma's work would lead us to expect an essential conflict in Hindu society between priest and king. A society which lays its emphasis upon the former, enhances the opposition found in all societies between the ideal and the real. The Brahman is superior to the Kshatriya and, in a sense, the Kshatriya's position is endorsed by the Brahman. On the other hand the Brahman is maintained by the Kshatriya both materially and as a member of that religious order which it is the Kshatriya's primary duty to maintain. So in any local hierarchy status is by reference to values endorsed by the Brahman yet the Brahman is materially dependent upon and serves precisely those who gauge their status in relation to him as their superior. Hocart, as we have seen, resolves this conflict, unjustifiably in our opinion, by elevating the Kshatriya as a divine king, initiator and receiver of the cult. His argument is no less "ideal" than that of the ancient texts which resolve the conflict in favour of the Brahman. Resolution in favour of either conceals the fact that whereas from the point of view of either purity (values) or power (behaviour) there is no conflict, in any given local situation there is no question of "either-or" but of both.

From our consideration of Hocart's argument and of recent field material we can see that from him derives firstly our understanding of the structural consistency of *varṇa* and *jāti*; secondly our criticism of his over-eager

[15] *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 1, p. 38–9.

acceptance of the priest-king has lead us at least to formulate as a problem for future research the articulation of Brahmanic values within a local political organization.

If Hocart is to be read with profit attention must be drawn to a marked inconsistency in his method. To put the matter simply he seems to have two contradictory approaches: on the one hand he is concerned with the living society and with relations, on the other he is also concerned with historical developments (known or hypothesized) and with identifications. Early in the work he makes the quite acceptable observation that, in considering his Sinhalese farmers, he is

> no more concerned with the question whether (they) are heirs of the body of the ancient farmers or not than the student of the institution of monarchy is concerned with the legitimacy of the House of Hanover; all we need trouble about is whether the Ceylon farmers occupy the place and perform the functions of the old farmer caste or not. (p. 5)

It is clear from the context that Hocart is here directing his attention to the structure of the living society. Even more clear is a later statement referring to the variety of Brahman castes throughout India:

> Thus lineages which officiate in the brahmanic ritual are all labelled "brahman"... The different lineages may possibly not intermarry or have anything to do with one another, but their status is priestly. Even so the aristocracies of England and Japan do not intermarry, or even know one another, but they recognize each other as occupying corresponding planes each in its own society, as "homologues", if we can use a biological term. (p. 33)

This is a profitable approach, from our point of view and it is in no way assisted by a further attempt to establish historical 'blood relations' between *jāti* and *varṇa*, *jāti* here being considered as the lineage or tribe which preserves and hands down the occupation and status originally ascribed by the ancient *varṇa*. His discussion of the supposed break down of a *varṇa* society which involved changes of occupation and status would, taken by itself, lead us back to that chaos of caste dictionaries and census reports from which Hocart had earlier lead us away. His discussion concludes with a glaring inconsistency which we quote simply as an example of the complex and contrary mind with which we have to deal:

> Even the brahmins have failed to keep out aboriginal blood, as can readily be seen by the black skin and thick lips and noses of some of the southern ones. (p. 46).

It is scarcely credible that the same person wrote this who earlier (p. 29 et seq.) dealt so magisterially with the race theory of caste, and insisted

upon the difference between *jāti* as an existing lineage or local group and *jāti* as an existing group having a particular status and occupation in the system.[16]

A second example of inconsistency which we have already touched upon in another context (above p. 59) is connected with the foregoing. Hocart has discussed the system and the position of particular castes within it and has been concerned with relations. It follows that it is the system and its values which determine identities and not *vice-versa*. Death, for example, is one of the centres of pollution and therefore anyone involved in death, either by kinship or occupation will be, temporarily or permanently, untouchable. It does not follow that the caste associated with death ceremonies and hence untouchable will necessarily be the barber caste. Only if we think of the barber caste as being lineally descended from a court functionary in a supposed court ritual are we liable to lose a structural perspective on this matter.

We may legitimately wonder whether Hocart's perceptions are not vitiated by a fundamental weakness of method. We may take as an example his account of the relation between kings and priests and what he conceives to be their divine counterparts. He opens his brief discussion with the statement: "Royalty and priesthood form a pair. As usual the world of gods reflects the world of men and *vice versa*." (p. 38). But immediately he passes from speaking of reflection to speak of "impersonation" and finally of "identity": "the identity of priest and priestly god is carried out in detail", and earlier "the king and the other worthy people *stand for* the gods" (p. 35–6 our italics): compared with "The king *is* Indra. He *is* also Varuna." This movement from similarities of position to identification would be unexceptionable, paradoxically, in a less intelligent writer. Hocart however goes on to discuss the relations involved and his ascription of identities makes for confusion. Thus:

> Priestly gods unite with royal gods to form compounds such as Indragni, Indrabrihaspati, Agnisoma. This pairing is conceived as that of man and wife: "Then Indragni were created, the priesthood and the sovreignty... These two when created were separate. They said, 'As we cannot procreate offspring let the two of us be one form.'" ... Of Mitravaruna it is said, "Mitra spills semen into Varuna."...
>
> Man and wife are heaven and earth, so are the king and priest. The royal gods are celestial, more especially solar. The priestly gods are their counterparts. Thus in the couple Mitravaruna "Mitra is this early world, Varuna yon heavenly world." Agni is the earthly representative of the sun: "he is to men what the sun

[16] See p. 45, 46 above.

is to the gods." As impersonators of these gods, the brahmans are entitled "earth gods." (p.38)

We have to distinguish in this two radically different ways of thinking and to decide which of them is most likely to be that of the texts with which Hocart deals. On the one hand we have the kind of thought which can speak of polytheism and of gods as distinct individualities with distinctive characteristics; on the other there is a kind of thinking which is frankly metaphorical, relational as all metaphorical thought and speech must be. The first attempts to answer questions about being and the second to answer questions about relation; thus "Man and wife are heaven and earth, so are the king and priest," and "(Agni) is to man what the sun is to the gods". The development of anthropological research since Hocart's time inclines us to the view that it is with the latter kind of thinking that we are dealing here.[17]

Hocart is, in fact, reporting one kind of thinking and expressing himself in another. Thus from the first sentence quoted immediately above he goes on to speak of solar gods and earth gods, a conception wholly alien to Hindu thought past or present.

The obvious comparison in point of method is provided by Dumézil's discussion of the couple Mitra-Varuna.[18] There Professor Dumézil regulates his analysis by the fundamental rule that in his texts he is dealing with relational thought. Certainly comparison with ancient Rome liberates him from the deception of names as establishing identities but more important is his perception of the relation of opposition between these two gods or concepts. Faced with the variety of contexts in which Mitra or Varuna are described, Sylvain Lévi had suggested that we were dealing with the creations of fantasy. Dumézil observes that this is so only if one is concerned to be literal and neglects the underlying intention. Mitra is the left hand and Varuna the right or *vice versa*, the point to be considered is whether, in the given context, the right hand is considered to be the strong side or the just side. Commenting upon the expression: "Mitra is this earthly world, Varuna yon heavenly world," he shows that there is no question here of the simple superiority of the latter as Hocart suggests. It is a matter, rather, of a fundamental opposition in the religious exper-

[17] Cf. Godfrey Lienhardt, "Modes of Primitive Thought" in *The Institutions of Primitive Society* (Oxford, 1956). Lienhardt there objects to the use of the word metaphorical where it is opposed to the literal. Here we have employed the word metaphor rather in the sense implied by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in *Nuer Religion* (Oxford, 1956) particularly in Chapter V. There metaphor is not opposed to literal but describes the way in which the Nuer express conceptual and situational relations (see pp. 127–8).

[18] *Op. cit.* (above p. 52).

ience between the ordered and rational on the one hand and the unpredictable on the other. As a commentary upon Hocart's procedure Dumézil's footnote (p. 84) is relevant:

> We must take care... not to dissociate (these couplings) and to employ them separately outside the system which gives them their meaning.

We may conclude our discussion by citing Professor Dumézil more generally on the question of method. His statement, in its economy, could scarcely be bettered.[19] He insists that in the comparison of Indo-European civilizations the student deals with structures (not necessarily social structures) and not with elements; secondly he must be prepared to compare homologous structures at whatever level they may present themselves. We may quote part of Dumézil's conclusion:

> However primitive he may be, man from the moment he thinks at all thinks in systems; certainly he contradicts himself... but still it is systems which are contradictory... The religious system of a group expresses itself at the same time on several levels: first of all in a conceptual structure more or less explicit, sometimes almost unconscious but always present, which is, as it were, the field within which all else is disposed and oriented; next in myths which figure forth and enact these fundamental conceptual relations; next in rites which actualize, mobilize and use these same relations; finally often in a social organization, a distribution of occupations, or in a sacerdotal body which administers these concepts, myths and rites.[20]

It being granted that many of the texts which Hocart employs are irrelevant to an understanding of contemporary society there remains, then, the negative lesson to be learned from his use of them. Comparison within a society or between two societies, is not concerned with apparent similarities or apparently analogous institutions but with fundamental, homologous structures. Thus speaking of the different emphases of Hindu and Roman civilization and illustrating his insistence upon comparison at any level, Dumézil says:

> If we seek in Rome the homologue of the Indian divine myths we must be prepared to find it connected not with Roman gods but with the heroes of the royal period. (p. 38)

In our consideration of Bouglé we saw that he stressed the importance of religious values in the caste system. Hocart's contribution is that he has observed these religious values from the people's point of view and given them a communicable content. His faults do not in our opinion take away

[19] *L'Héritage Indo-Européen à Rome* (Paris, 1949), Chap. I.
[20] *Loc. cit.*, p. 38.

from this contribution. In our criticism we have tried to be as positive as possible and to criticize only where there appeared to be some profit in doing so. The fact that Hocart spent a considerable period of his life abroad possibly isolated him from developments which were taking place in England in the 1930's. He could have little sympathy with the functionalist and monographic emphasis of Malinowski and to the extent that he failed to involve himself in the radical reconsideration of assumptions which took place at that time, his work is weakened. But for us, now that the arguments of the thirties are safely distanced it is possible to realize that we profit from Hocart's isolation. At a time when his colleagues were insisting more and more upon the monographic study of one primitive tribe he persisted in the study of wide areas and of civilizations; we benefit by his assumption that India is a whole. We may wonder whether without his interest in comparison and his Fijian material, he would have been able to observe the fundamental opposition upon which the caste system is organized. And having noted this, whatever we may object to his conclusion, he avoids the crudity of the Radcliffe-Brownian dichotomy of religion and society, "ritual and secular values", which can find no place in an analysis of Hindu society.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

III